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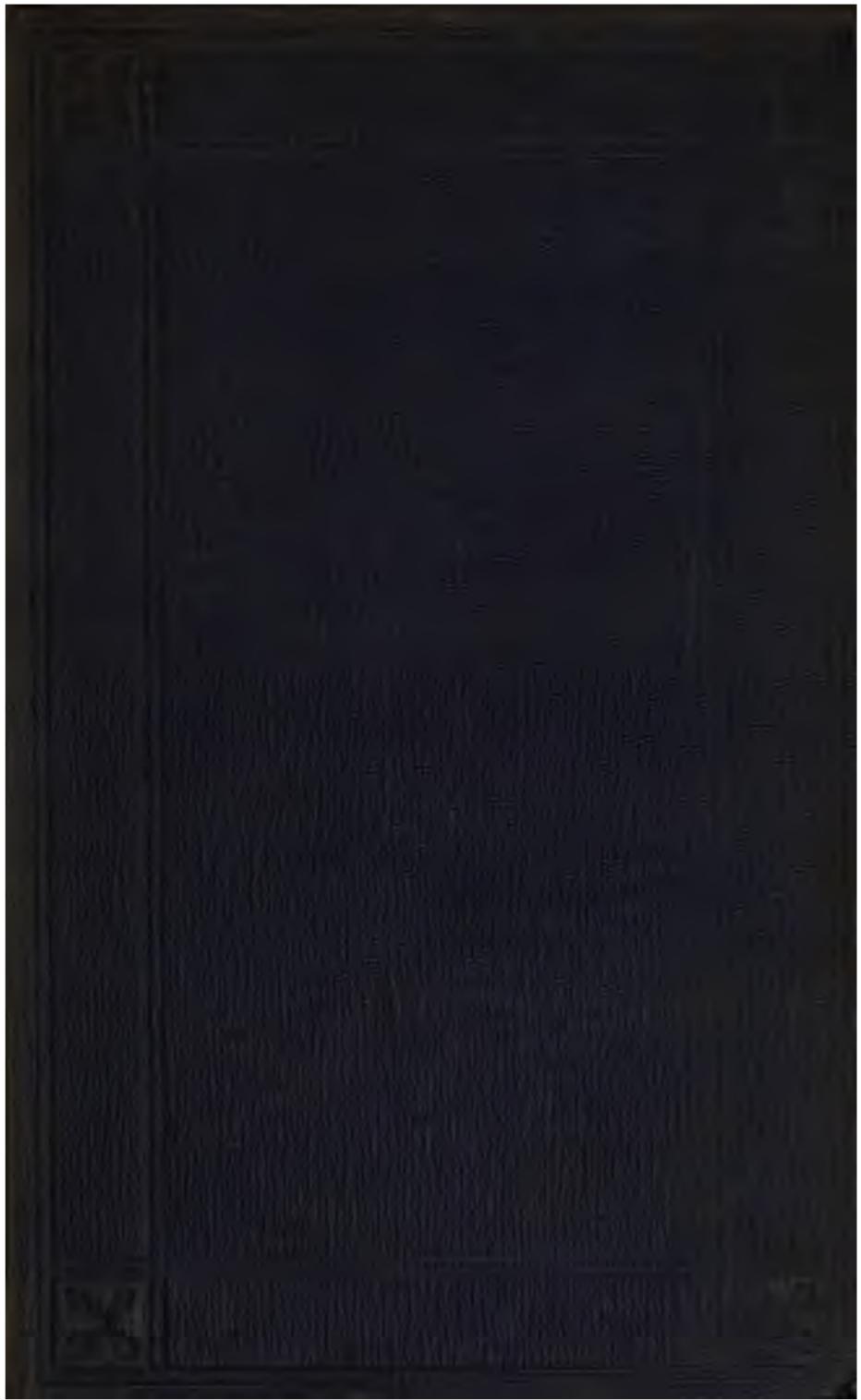
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"First cast out the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye."—MATTHEW vii. 5.

"What memorable service would be rendered to all evangelical churches if they were timely warned, in a candid and friendly spirit, of defects or exaggerations in their systems, sure one day to cause a re-action, to hurt their influence, damage their prosperity, perhaps imperil their existence."—THE NEWS OF THE CHURCHES, July 1, 1856.

"The best and safest way for you, therefore, my dear brethren, is to call your deeds past to a new reckoning, to re-examine the cause ye have taken in hand, and to try it, even point by point, argument by argument, with all the diligent exactness ye can. . . . Think ye are men; deem it not impossible for you to err; sift impartially your own hearts, whether it be force of reason, or vehemency of affection, which hath bred and still doth feed these opinions in you. If truth do anywhere manifest itself, seek not to smother it with glozing delusion, acknowledge the greatness thereof, and think it your best victory when the same doth prevail over you."—Preface to HOOKER'S ECCLESIASTICAL POLITY, chap. ix.

LECTURES
ON THE
ECCLESIASTICAL SYSTEM
OF THE
INDEPENDENTS,
AND PARTICULARLY
ON ITS PRESENT ASPECTS AND CAPABILITIES;
DELIVERED IN MANCHESTER, APRIL, 1854:
TOGETHER WITH NOTES,
AND AN APPENDIX ON DENOMINATIONAL LITERATURE.
BY S. T. PORTER.

" Whatsoever is spoken of God, or of things appertaining to God, otherwise than as the truth is, though it seem an honour, it is an injury. And as incredible prises given unto men do often abate and impair the credit of their deserved commendation; so we must likewise take great heed lest, in attributing unto Scripture more than it can have, the incredibility of that do cause even those things which indeed it hath most abundantly to be less reverently esteemed. I therefore leave it to themselves to consider, Whether they have in this first point overshot themselves or not; which, God doth know, is quickly done, even when our meaning is most sincere; as I am verily persuaded theirs in this case was." — *Hooke's Ecclesiastical Polity*, book ii., chap. 8.



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PREFACE.

THESE Lectures were delivered in Manchester, in April, 1854, under the presidency of James Watts, Esq., the present Mayor of that city, at the request of whom, associated with other gentlemen, they had been prepared. Although somewhat reluctant, I should have respectfully yielded to the strong desire of the rather numerous friends who had favoured me with audience, and of many others, for their immediate publication, had I not had reason to believe that this would involve some of the original proposers of the Lectures in local controversies that were inexpedient. The difficulty disappeared in the course of a few months; but I then thought that the opportunity for publication was closed.

Certain occurrences, however, in connexion with the recent meetings of the Congregational Union of England and Wales, have revived, and have rendered more forcible than previously, my apprehension that the publication of the Lectures

may be serviceable to many Independents and, perhaps, to other readers than Independents.

The Rev. T. T. Lynch of London had published a volume of sacred poetry, called *The Rivulet*, which, together with a favourable notice of it in *The Eclectic Review*, elicited from Mr. James Grant, the editor of *The Morning Advertiser*, several articles in that journal, that were subsequently re-published as a pamphlet with the writer's name. Of the volume itself it is unnecessary, and it might be improper, for me to say more here, than that in the opinion of the best judges it contains much beautiful poetry, and expresses many of the best and deepest feelings common to spiritual men.

This book, now, had been offered for ordinary criticism; and objections to its sentiments or its style, or to the employment of it in public worship, might have been reasonably made. But not only did Mr. Grant attack the book itself with a fury and a recklessness that seldom characterise public writers in England; he seemed to do his utmost, first, to deprive Mr. Lynch of his congregation, the editor of the *Eclectic Review* of his readers, and even the publisher of Mr. Lynch's volume of his customers, and afterwards, when fifteen ministers in London and the suburbs had

expressed generous sympathy with Mr. Lynch, and indignation at the attack on *The Eclectic*, to expose these gentlemen also to the *odium theologicum* of all narrow minds and fearful hearts, and to excite fatal dissensions in their congregations.

But here the disturbance might have terminated ; at least, Independents as such would have had no occasion to take part in it, whatever they might have done as men and as Christians. The editor of *The British Banner*, however, succeeded to Mr. Grant's part when this writer retired; and, avowing himself to be Dr. John Campbell, adopted all that Mr. Grant had written, and, too, produced a long series of original and lengthy articles on *The Rivulet*, which also have been republished as a pamphlet. The chief design in these articles was to show that the theology of *The Rivulet* was both defective and opposed, in some respects, to orthodoxy; and although the writer intimated that he should not have put himself to so much trouble had not the book been eulogized by *The Eclectic*, and sustained by the fifteen ministers who had protested against Mr. Grant's style of reviewing, yet his captious cavils at the poetry were at once so spiteful and so absurd, and his efforts to expose Mr. Lynch himself as heterodox, and

as the representative of an heretical school, were so virulent and so sustained, as to suggest that, but for Dr. Campbell's expressions of contempt for *The Rivulet*, he might have been convicted of vindictiveness and hatred towards its author. Indeed it is necessary to think of Dr. Campbell as both meek and veracious, when people connect his disclaimers of personal feeling towards Mr. Lynch with a pamphlet published by Darling of London in the year 1850, and entitled, "*Wrong charged and Right pleaded: a letter to the editor of the Christian Witness and British Banner, by Thomas T. Lynch.*"

As in 1850 so in 1856, *The British Banner* and the magazines belonging to the Southern Congregational Union are all edited by Dr. John Campbell. It was not very wonderful, therefore, that some of the fifteen ministers to whom I have referred, being members of the Union, when at the annual meeting of this body it was proposed to thank Dr. Campbell for his labours in the magazines, should find it hard to distinguish altogether between the editor of the magazines and the editor of *The Banner*, and should speak as if not only they who were members of the Union, but as if Mr. Lynch, although not a member, had been grievously wronged by

the very editor whom they were asked to thank. Of the difficulty in which they were placed I have spoken elsewhere in a foot-note : at present I add only, that so many gentlemen seemed at fault in the discussions that arose, as if engaged upon questions that they had not maturely considered, that I resolved upon offering to them, and to others, such assistance as it appeared to me they might derive from my lectures. The third lecture, indeed, might have been written within the last few weeks, so pertinent is much of it to the occasion of its coming into print.*

Had I published these lectures immediately

* Just when I had written this sentence, I received from a friend in England a copy of a letter, printed for private circulation only, by one of the most distinguished members of the Union, whose name, as his letter is not published, I do not think it respectful to mention. Nor, extensively read as his letter will be, do I think it courteous in the circumstances to quote from it. But I may say that it confirms my conviction of the timeliness of my own publication ; and I must most earnestly entreat all who are concerned to consider whether anything is a matter with which a church has to deal and the public has not to deal, if, at least, "to deal with" includes "to consider;" or whether a union of churches can be a union of churches of Christ, if care be taken that the public shall not deal with its matters. I UTTERLY AND SOLEMNLY DISSENT FROM THE OPINION THAT IT CAN. A church is a public body, through whose public deeds the public may be benefited for Christ's sake.

upon their delivery, I should have felt myself bound to print them to the letter as delivered. But the lapse of more than two years relaxes, I think, such an obligation ; although the alterations that I have wished to make are but few and of small importance. I have made a few passages more luminous ; I have allowed three or four to stand which, although in my manuscript, I omitted, for brevity's sake, in the delivery ; and I have in two places, mentioned in foot-notes, exhibited the substance of communications made to me, instead of the communications themselves. These are the only changes that I have made in the text ; what new matter I have added, I have thought it right to insert in the form of notes and an appendix.

The appendix is a mere re-print of a part, much less than half, of an article contributed by me many years ago to *The Eclectic Review*. It is added because of its peculiar pertinence to a matter which the Congregational Union of England and Wales have undertaken to discuss in the ensuing autumn. It, too, I have reprinted to the letter, with the exception of two or three inadvertencies.

I now request particular attention to the following points.

1. These lectures were delivered at the request of Englishmen to an English audience, and in understood reference to such matters as the audience in general had had opportunity to notice. Unless, therefore, where I distinctly refer to the Scottish Independent churches, I must not be considered to allude to them. I have thought it necessary to intimate this elsewhere; but it deserves prominence here also. Very much, I think almost all, of what I have said, is applicable to Independents equally in North Britain and in South. But all is not; although I do not think the average condition of the Scottish churches better than that of the English. Let what I say, then, be applied where it is applicable, and there only. Then, however, the supporters of almost every form of polity in Scotland may read these lectures to their advantage, even while retaining their respective systems. For it appears to me that there are few of them who, in the present earnest rivalry that exists among them, are not tightening discipline instead of relaxing it, in the hope of becoming thus the more compact and imposing. Especially let my neighbours of the Free Church consider, and let them think it only fraternal that an observer asks them to consider, whether

the tendency of the ways of those of them who seek to form every kind of social institution among themselves, is not to isolate their church from the general community of men ; so consolidating it as to render it visible as an object rather than felt as a power, and impressive as a corporation rather than assimilative as a living spirit.

2. I maintain that it is my right, and every man's right, to deliver lectures on such topics as those that are here discussed, or to draw the attention of the public to them in any other way. Churches can never be sound unless they court publicity and deprecate privacy ; and he is their best friend, who seeks to expose their errors so that these may be seen by them in the light of a full and free public opinion. Yet I may state that from apprehension of my incompetency I should not have aimed at the object of these lectures, had I not been requested by such men as, viewed together, seemed to me to represent the best classes of the Independents. I had often been urged by other friends to undertake a similar service ; and at last I felt that I should shrink from a positive duty if I again declined. Of the manner in which I discharged my duty, my readers will now form their own opinion. If it coincides with that of my hearers,

numerous audiences in the circumstances, and the most evidently respectable that I ever knew to be assembled for the consideration of ecclesiastical topics, my satisfaction will be richer than any man could reasonably have anticipated.

I beg, however, to make one protest by anticipation ; against their course, I mean, who may say, as I am informed that a few people did say who read newspaper-reports of my lectures, that the lectures would have been good enough but for their spirit. I seldom hear complaints of the spirit, or the *animus*, of lectures and the like, but from professed although fainthearted friends of the lecturer or his cause ; men who by these inexplicable and unanswerable complaints of a man's "spirit," hope to draw away attention from his words ; or men who characteristically "let *I dare not* wait upon *I would*." I have wished, however, and have subjected myself in consequence to much discipline, that no worse spirit should pervade the lectures than the spirit breathing through the mottoes that I have chosen for them : and at present I am not aware that it is worse. But I have no desire to prune my language till, spirit all fled, the remaining body is nothing but a corpse ; and if a man is guileful, or savage, I do not know why I should

call him "my brother" if he be an Independent, and "the gentleman" if he be a Churchman.

3. I hope that justice will be done, too, in respect of my professed scope, the time allowed for my occupation of it, and the form of lectures, addresses from one man to many, in which I was required to conduct my examination. For instance, according to what I professed, it should not be expected, I think, that the lectures dwell upon the Scriptural authority of Independency, its philosophical character, or its points of contrast with other ecclesiastical systems. They were Lectures to Independents primarily, to whom most of this was supposed to be familiar ; and they were designed to be altogether practical, and in no wise controversial. I might, too, have alluded to many favourable aspects of Independency, and to many indications of the extension, particularly in the British Colonies, of the principles out of which as an ecclesiastical system it has its rise, had my time been longer than it was. Moreover, I should have avoided occasional repetition, perhaps have devised a better course of thought, and certainly have eschewed all reference to myself, had I written a treatise, not Lectures. But I was asked to lecture ; and I have not time to change the form of what I

did in answer. Here, too, may I be allowed to say, that had the Administrative Reform Association been in existence in the spring of 1854, I should have taken care not to appear to employ as a clap-trap its distinctive designation?

4. I am not endeavouring to construct a type of church-modes for universal adoption, or to substitute one general organization for another. This appears in various parts of the Lectures; though I think it desirable to declare it thus early also. In general organization I disbelieve; from uniformity of church-aspect and proceedings I revolt. With many brethren I lamented, and I still lament, that when Mr. Noel and others seceded from the Church of England, they passed into the established order of things among Baptists and Independents, as if this were the only alternative; thus divesting themselves of much personal power, and losing an opportunity of showing to Dissenters a more excellent way. My wish, therefore, is only to raise again the fallen standard of pure Independency, and to make manifest that beneath it may be embodied separate companies of countless varieties of appearance, but of one body, one spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all.

5. To both the friends and the foes of Independency I am eager, too, to give the assurance that, although I speak without misgiving of the certain dissolution of the national churches, I see and fully appreciate, I think all, but certainly enough for the occasion, of the various powers that at present maintain them in coherence, and the various difficulties connected with their dissolution. Yet I must say of Independency, "It moves still." I look at tendencies, not at dead if massive concrete; characteristic and general tendencies, and not spasmodic agitation, or partial and merely occasional efforts to invigorate vitality. Be it true, as the Lord Chancellor seemed the other day to think, when citing Mrs. Barbauld's testimony to the allegation, (an allegation to which many of us can give a qualified support,) that dissent seldom remains in a family beyond two generations; yet how prodigiously since Mrs. Barbauld's days has the national spirit become animated with the principles of "Dissent!" It is true that it was only on June 23d of the present year that *The Times* wrote, "The Established Church possesses the affections of the upper and the higher part of the middle classes, which, besides being the most powerful and influential portions of the com-

munity, are as yet almost the exclusive applicants for a University education. She has the advantage of old tradition, of established associations, of long occupation, and the whole *genius loci* of the place. She is the natural and hereditary possessor of the ground, and has all the advantage which an existing system in full and active operation can give. She has her old channels of communication, her old connexions, old relations to large classes of the community." So wrote *The Times* on June 23d; but then it commenced the article by saying, "It ought to be now pretty evident to the universities, that the reign of tests is approaching an end. Whether tests are right or wrong, it is plain, as a matter of fact, that public opinion is becoming more and more opposed to them." Granting, now, that the former quotation exhibits a great work for dissent to do ; the latter quotation declares that the work is in effectual progress ; and more than this I have not asserted.

6. The question, then, that it becomes Independents and other dissenters to consider, is this ; whether while doing so much for the destruction of Established Churches, we are not under obligation to render our voluntary churches more attractive to the general public,

in respect, I mean, of all that is good and great and pleasant, than we have been wont to care to render them. I cannot acquiesce in their position who seem to regard a church as a mere private association of refugees, in whose affairs other men have no right to interest themselves, and who, if they do wrong to no man and trouble no man, are under no obligation to think of the impression that they may produce upon the minds of other people. Describing a church as an association of people who unite for the pursuit of their spiritual edification in common, yet it must not be forgotten that this edification is a means to an ulterior end, the glory of God in the universe; that not the proofs of edification, but its processes also, should be made manifest would we glorify God fully; that spiritual edification cannot be promoted but in harmony with men's common constitution; that spiritual edification in Christ cannot be promoted but in harmony with the characteristics of His kingdom, such as light, freedom, publicity; that all considerations which apply to the subject constrain us, therefore, to appeal in all that we do to the conscience of every man in the fear of God; finally, that in strictness of speech "a church" and "a private society" are contra-

dictory terms; and that no less by our ways in Christ than by the word of Christ it is both our duty and our wisdom to endeavour to persuade men to have fellowship with us. Is it right that a church, or that a union of churches, shall authorise the suspicion that its doings will not bear light? Is it right that a church shall be such a society as it will be impossible to multiply till the product fills the land?

7. "Any one who has had experience in this department, knows the extreme difficulty there is in effecting any change in educational custom and routine, especially in our middle classes. There is no question on which people are more sensitive, suspicious, and nervous. They like going on in their old ways; and dissenters are just as much slaves of tradition as any other people." So said *The Times* of June 23d; and, I think, truly. For we adhere to specific precedents and secondary principles rather, perhaps, than to first principles and general exemplifications of them.

It is only within the last few weeks that I was so fortunate as to meet with the valuable sermon of Mr. Scott's to which I refer more particularly elsewhere, and which is entitled "The first principle of Church Government;

an induction from Scriptural examples." Speaking in that sermon of such as say, in the manner of so many Independents, "Apostles and apostolic men might thus exercise discretion, being filled with the Holy Ghost ; for such as we are, nothing better remains than to search for their footsteps and implicitly to tread in them ;" the author adds, "As though it were treading in their footsteps to do as they never would have done ; as though the lack of inspiration enabled men to do the better without the use of common sense ; as though, to employ the ordinary theological distinction, selection of means were not the proper business of the ordinary operations of the Spirit, as these are contrasted with the extraordinary. For surely guidance according to the occurrences of our daily life, whether personal or corporate, is what Christian men may hope and pray for, if for any thing."—Pp. 46, 47. On p. 29, too, Mr. Scott says of the synagogue-system : "It cannot reasonably be questioned that it was one introduced because of its reasonableness; that the part of the Spirit of God here was to enlighten and dispose men to do what was rational to be done ; and that an example was here set us, of looking to their fitness for their end as the ground of ecclesiastical institutions."

And many other such examples are given to us in the Scriptures. Mr. Scott enumerates and lucidly explains six ; showing that the judges in the days of Moses, the schools of the prophets, the synagogues before Christ, the synagogues after Christ, the deacons, and the council at Antioch, all were originated through neither external oracle nor extraordinary inspiration, but solely in consequence of the free action and determination of the minds of men, enlightened and good according to the development of their dispensation. To this list I may add the following instances, to which also, among others, I have long been in the habit of referring, as signal instances of good men's departure from specific precedents and secondary principles on occasions on which they thought changes expedient :—1st, The erection of a temple instead of the tabernacle, that venerable relic, a case particularly marked by Stephen ; 2dly, The addition of a system of both vocal and instrumental music to the typical worship in the tabernacle and temple ; 3rdly, The occasional erection of altars ; 4thly, The institution of solemn festivals, as the Feast of Purim, and the Feast of Dedication ; 5thly, The election of an apostle in the place of Judas ; 6thly, The use and the disuse of what is ordinarily but improperly called “ The community

of goods ;” 7thly, The way in which the Lord’s Supper was observed at first by the church in Jerusalem; and, in general, the various arrangements and re-arrangements which were made in the early churches according to their changing circumstances. Now in no one of these cases have we evidence that extraordinary Divine aid was either given or required for the course that was adopted; while there is some evidence that in each case, and abundant in almost every one, that the Divine sanction was given to the change either when proposed or when effected.

As last words I append some more of Mr. Scott’s, who says, pp. 49, 50, “On the whole, we conclude that the right use of precedent is misunderstood both by the traditionist and the bibliclist,” already distinctly described; “while nothing has been stated at variance with that true reverence for antiquity, which seeks a church presenting the clearest image of eternity in the midst of the mutations of time. . . . Even in forms and methods the old is not to be set aside merely for being old; nay, this is of itself so far in its favour. Let its antiquity be considered as a reason for it, but not as foreclosing all reasoning about it.”

S. T. P.

GLASGOW, *August 1, 1856.*

LECTURES ON INDEPENDENCY.

L E C T U R E I.

INTRODUCTORY.

THE subject on which I have undertaken to speak is not likely to appear of the same importance to all my auditors. To some of them it may seem on no account to require distinct public discussion ; to others it may appear worthy of no more prominence than such as might be given to it in ordinary meetings of churches ; while by a few, at least, it is classed among those subjects to which the thoughtful and even the profound attention of Christian people should for their own sakes be religiously given, which are rapidly becoming of grave practical importance to the nation at large, and which, perhaps, can be thoroughly and justly investigated in no private circle, and, indeed, nowhere but before

It is right, too, to say that I am connected with no association, and ought not to be regarded as the representative of any party, aiming at the general reform of the Independent churches. I believe that since the publication of Mr. Miall's book on the British Churches, such an association has been formed; and I have heard something of the aims and the measures of many who profess to adopt the views advocated in that book and in the proceedings of the association. My respect for Mr. Miall is deep, and my persuasion is a grateful one that his public services in general have been very valuable. From the reports, however, that have reached me respecting both the general estimate of his book and the operations of the parties to whom I have alluded, my opinion is confirmed, that many of Mr. Miall's apprehensions and aims differ greatly from my own. I speak with caution, as I wish not to attribute to him consequences that he might disavow; but certainly I fear that one effect of many of the measures proposed by him, and by the reformers who are popularly classified with him, would be to increase the dislike of the more highly cultivated members of society towards Independency, and to render it almost impossible that any man of personal indepen-

dence of character, and of general fitness to conduct the services that are required from Christian pastors in the present circumstances of this country, should consent on any consideration to take the oversight of a church.

It may prevent some misconstruction if I add, that neither the requisition to deliver these Lectures, nor my acceptance of it, is in any way a token of departure from what is conventionally termed orthodoxy. It would baffle most minds to detect any necessary connexion between Independence, whether pure or mixed, and either orthodoxy or heterodoxy. But as supporters of a traditional ecclesiasticism are sometimes wont to charge its challengers with doctrinal heresy, and as, while pleading for a strict Independence, I shall plead for none but what is distinctively catholic, I cannot repress the feeling that both my friends and myself are exposed to the insinuations, and to the more open attacks, of men whose orthodoxy has little respect to either the form or the principle of the ninth commandment. While, then, demurring to the assumption, that a man cannot think differently from another on the just idea of a church without thinking differently from him on matters that exist altogether irrespectively of churches, I have

yet no hesitation in declaring my belief, that no orthodox church would debar from its fellowship any individual concerned in the delivery of these lectures, on any ground relating to orthodoxy. Whether this fact is to our honour or not, is not the question ; but since it is a fact, it ought to pass.

I must, lastly, deprecate the supposition, that my presence here is an act of hostility to any pastor or to any church. It would be easy, and only consistent with truth, to make this disclaimer stronger and more particular ; but really in times like ours it should never for a moment be assumed, that the ingenuous utterance of thought is necessarily inimical to either individuals or societies. And I trust that there is less than many deem, of that peculiar and most offensive selfishness which, under whatever name, would question whether truth and good can be where it is not present, and deny that love can rule in men whose obedience to their own convictions may seem to reflect in any wise unfavourably on its wisdom, or to threaten a diminution of its authority and its wealth. It is possible that in this matter the present generation of pastors and churches suffers some dispute in consequence of the faults of a preceding.

INTRODUCTORY.

It is in our own power, however, to outlive all such misconception of our spirit and our aims. And it is with no small amount of pleasurable confidence and hope that I appeal, on behalf of my friends and myself, to as many as may be tempted to feel aggrieved by our procedures, praying them to put the best possible construction on our conduct, and to believe that we, too, may be working a work of the Lord, even as are they. Yet if it fall out otherwise, I can only say, accommodating the language of Milton, "For me, I have determined to lay up as the best treasure and solace of a good old age, if God vouchsafe it me, the honest liberty of free speech, wheresoever I shall think it available in so dear a concernment as the Church's good. Concerning, therefore, this wayward subject of Independency, the touching whereof is so distasteful and disquietous to a number of men, as I deserve of charitable auditors to be credited, that neither envy nor gall hath entered me upon this controversy, but the enforcement of conscience only, and a preventive fear lest the omitting of this duty should be against me, when I would store up to myself the good provision of peaceful hours; so, lest it should be still imputed to me, that some self-pleasing humour of vainglory hath incited me

to contest with men of high estimation, from this needless surmisal I shall hope to dissuade the intelligent and equal auditor, if I can but say successfully that which in this exigent behoves me."

I have adverted to my deep and lively sense of the importance of my subject. And as I doubt not that the Independent is the only church system instituted by apostles for general adoption, or adapted to the Divine constitution of our nature, it should be impossible for me to handle Independency in any circumstances but with solemnity and care indicative of earnestness and reverence. Both jocosity and wrath should be no less thoroughly purged out of the spirit of a man who regards Independency as I regard it, when he advocates it for the good of other men and for the glory of God, than the same humours should be foreign to his spirit who uplifts the cross of Christ for men's salvation. And though I must in these lectures assume rather than prove the Divine right of Independency, yet should not the consequent absence of scriptural illustrations be abused as an occasion for levity to disport itself, or for petulance to wax froward. Next to the assertion of Independency, the exhibition of its dues and its capabilities should be regarded as a

work for grave minds only: and if this exhibition cannot be made without reflection on the withholding of a portion of its dues by many who have notwithstanding been among its staunchest supporters, if not its most enlightened, the recognition of brothers' errors should but the more effectually repress all ungentle dispositions; while, since the present state of things among people who stand aloof from Independency is one of the chief stimulants to an exhibition of its capabilities, this circumstance should, for the sake of these bystanders, and for the truth's sake also, exert a specific power in constraining us so to represent the truth, that its imperial and most gracious majesty shall be willingly confessed and worshipped.*

* I do not wish to assert that Independency is permanently obligatory because it was sanctioned by apostles for general adoption in their day. Much less do I assume that it was enjoined on them by special Divine revelation of any kind. Some of the most important institutions and deeds that were ever adopted by prophets and apostles, and sanctioned by the Almighty, had their rise in good men's perception of their expediency. Their duration, then, it is evident, should be limited by the expediency; and as good men of old, in the ordinary use of their faculties in harmony with the Divine dispensation of their times, discerned what was expedient, and what was inexpedient, and acted accordingly, it appears to me that the same responsibility devolves upon the good men of all times. It should be observed,

My last words suggest the point of view from which especially it is my desire that those who favour me with audience should consider the matters that I shall bring before them. I believe that we Independents have isolated ourselves from the great moral community to such an extent as rarely to try the operations of our polity by any standard of propriety acknowledged by men in general. Doubtless this is very much the case with other sects also ; the fact being strong against all sectarianism. But it is not with other sects that we are concerned at present ; and though very much that I may say respecting Independency may be more or less applicable to other church systems, it ill becomes us as Christian men to be on this account indifferent to our own

however, that when the apostles adopted Independency, because they thought it expedient, the expediency appears to have consisted primarily in the adaptation of the system to the Divine constitution of our nature. And, surely, if proved to be ill adapted to our nature unless in exceptional circumstances, few men would be so bold as to plead that it is permanently and universally obligatory. I have recently met with a very valuable sermon on these topics, entitled, *The First Principle of Church Government*, by A. J. Scott. London : Darling ; 1845. I may, perhaps, be allowed to express deep regret, while not concurring in every minor statement of Mr. Scott's, that this gentleman, now the Principal of Owen's College, Manchester, has favoured the public with so few of the results of his scriptural researches.

errors. Let just conclusions regarding these errors be reached by us whom they chiefly concern ; and, on the supposition that we act accordingly, we shall then, at all events we shall not earlier, have a title to say, "Brother, let us pull out the mote out of thine eye."

I know no text, now, that better deserves our consideration as Independents, or that would constitute a fitter motto for these lectures, than the saying of the apostle Paul's,—“We dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves : but they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.” I propose, then, that we measure ourselves, if not by other men, yet by such standards as apply equally to all ; and that we so conduct the exercise that it may profit us as a man is profited, not only who seemeth right in his own cause, but whom his neighbour hath searched. It is our ordinary boast, indeed, that there is no common standard but the Scriptures ; but if we would see whether or not, in the esteem of Christian men in general, we have departed from the Scriptures, or have added to the Scriptures, making void the commandments of God by our traditions, we must, if not formally,

yet mentally, keep in view those interpretations of the Scriptures that are generally current, and those first principles to which the Scriptures themselves appeal. And as I am not likely to discuss a single disputed text, or to appeal to any but the very commonest sense, I hope thus to avoid all partial and self-flattering judgments.

And it must be important that we should learn the whole of what other men can say concerning us, to whatever use we, in our fear of God, may put the knowledge. For although we be elect of God, so, too, are thousands who yet walk not with us. And they think, and we may not gainsay it, that they, too, have the Spirit of God. Are we spiritual people? So are they. Are we Christians? So are they. Are we communicants in the Lord's Supper? So are they. Are we ministers of Christ? No less authentic are the seals of the ministry that they, too, have received of the Lord Jesus. So that whereinsoever any of us is bold, though peradventure they speak foolishly, they are bold also. What then? Is Christ divided? Is there now more than one Spirit? Or Christians who are not Independents, do they only lack power to declare what they see in Independency? Or are they given over to delusion in relation to it?

And while opening our eyes, and unstopping our ears, to take note of what our brethren say concerning us, let us further beware of seeking the opinions of such members only of all sects, as have some few spiritual apprehensions in common. There are spiritual schools, as well as doctrinal and ecclesiastical sects. For there are men who, differing as to dogma and as to polity, yet agree in a few peculiar feelings, or rather, perhaps, in disproportionate efforts to cultivate these feelings, and in the importance that they attach to them when thus over-cultivated ; who assume that they are pre-eminent for spiritual-mindedness ; and who disrespect brethren whose spirituality is rather more comprehensive, whether of their own church or of any other ; accounting these if not, indeed, of the world, yet worldly. No such men, now, of whatever sect they are members, are competent to form a just judgment of the aspects of a church system. They are men of a one-sided and a narrow spirituality. They hardly see spirituality in the moral principles and feelings, or in the general character ; but see it almost exclusively in its verbal and sentimental manifestations in regard to the work of Christ and the work of the Spirit, and in such a shrinking from many duties of their actual position, as well as from

many social positions altogether, as indicates a weak, a morbid, even a false spirituality, rather than what is scriptural and apostolic. I would exhibit modern Independency, now, as it appears in general to a much vaster community than the small section of the Christian church which these men constitute. I would catch the utterance of the aggregate Christianized mind of the entire country in relation to it. And for this I would turn chiefly to such formers and such oracles of public opinion as, although perhaps they speak little of religion, yet speak still less without religion, and never make appeal to their religious principles and Christian motives but amidst the respectful though, it may be, meetly silent sympathies of their auditors. In this rarer atmosphere, this purer light, then, let us see how Independency is regarded ; and although we at once behold many a smile of mingled pity, amusement, and contempt, on the countenances of those who here criticise it, yet we see a something in it that strongly attracts those who look beneath its surface to its impulses and its constitution.

For there exists a very extensive movement among all ecclesiastical bodies, except the Catholics, towards the Church Principles of the Independents ; a movement, however, the chief

check upon which results from an apprehension that Independency, whatever be the aspect of its theory, has practically failed in important respects to attain the legitimate ends of a Church Polity. When asserting such a movement, I may be referred to the numerous instances of desertion from Independency, as evidence opposed to the alleged fact in favour of it. And it is undeniable that there are numerous instances of such desertion ; although I do not see how they disprove the existence of an uneasiness in the body joined by those who leave us, that tends naturally to Independency as its only possible termination. The renouncers of Independency, it is true, give testimony to its practical inefficiency in some departments, and thus assist to maintain the apprehension of which I have spoken as applying a check to the movement in its favour : but as the movement itself is not thus disproved, so neither is it thus allayed. The general discussions concerning Church Polity to which the Free Church Secession in Scotland, and the schisms in the Wesleyan Methodist body in England, have given rise, have aided in directing public notice to Independency, as possibly the haven to which both severe logic and a high-bred moral feeling would compel all Christian commu-

nities. The disputes in the Church of England itself, however, are the chief causes of the rising sentiment in that body, that Independency is not without attractions. Each of the three great classes into which the members of the Church of England may be distributed, has had its famous martyrs and confessors to the very truths of which Independency is the only adequate expression. Thus, of the men who, from the impulses given by Pusey, Newman, and others, have sought a home in Catholicism, the larger part were as unfit for their new system as for their old. Their principles and arguments pointed to an earlier and a still more comprehensive Church System than the Papacy. They halted at this ; but it was ignorance and timidity that withheld them from descending to the granite of a more remote antiquity, rather than the feeling that they had reached the unmoveable, the axiomatic, the self-evident. They wondered that they had been bold enough to dig so deep for a foundation ; but those who watched them saw that, after all, they were but effecting a compromise with conscience, or with logic, and that they ought to stop at nothing short of Independency. Among these observers there were many of their brethren who deemed it wiser for themselves to

withhold profession of primary Church principles, than to profess and not go on unto perfection. These men, it is true, had no love for such perfection, a perfection terminating in Independency; but neither had they any for a mere change from one manifested imperfection to another. Motionless, they had only to stand on the defensive : and for this it was sufficient for them to cite the ancient oracle, "Disturb not Camerina, it is better if unmoved ;" or the scriptural injunction, "Meddle not with them that are given to change." Notwithstanding which, however, the impatience of parliamentary trammels manifested by those of the Oxford party who have not repaired to Rome, their schismatical deportment, also, towards their own supreme ecclesiastical authorities, and their intense mutual suspicions and jealousies, all betoken a condition of which Independency is the only natural, however distant, issue.

One of the most courageous, not to say audacious, of the more conservative leaders of this party, I mean the Bishop of Oxford, speaking at the recent convocation of the province of Canterbury, of the very definite rubrics which the clergy had for their ritual observance, is reported to have said : "To carry out the rubrics literally in almost any populous district would

give rise to commotion and disturbance of the most frightful kind ; and yet the clergy are bound by solemn obligations to observe these rubrics and fulfil that ritual, and no dispensing power is lodged anywhere ; and this is a yoke that is becoming intolerable, I say, to conscientious men.” And he presently added, “A rigid and unaltered system might do for a time of the Church’s sleep, but not for a time of wakefulness and vigour ; and if it pleased God to give a revival to the Church’s zeal, and there were provided no means of lawful adaptation of the system to the requirements of the population, the Church must be torn by intestine throes, threatening its organized existence.”

Meanwhile, the cases of Shore, Gladstone, Noel, Gorham, not to speak of a goodly company less widely known, at least of late years, of which company names like these may be regarded as representatives, have excited searching inquiries among thousands of the evangelical members of the Church of England respecting the compatibility of clerical conscientiousness with union to an organization, whether of congregations or of clergymen, beneath episcopal superintendence. And in proof that no important party in the English State Church is without most irritating

mementoes of the tremendous price that it must needs pay for the adventitious advantages of affiliation to an imposing ecclesiastical corporation, it is sufficient to refer to the persecution of the broad and liberal Hampden, or to the recent interference with the popular and powerful Maurice.*

It is very difficult, however, for men who are not on terms of intimacy with observant clergymen, to estimate the degree to which the symptomatic uneasiness of which we speak has risen. It is, perhaps, even more difficult than to appreciate aright the various considerations that restrain conscientious and sensitive men from violating bonds by which they have once, though in their immaturity, determined their position.

* Readers of only ordinary information would find it easy to add indefinitely to the foregoing indications. During the two years alone that have passed since the text was written, how many and how important are the new facts that betoken the existence of revolutionary and unappeasable elements in the Church of England! I refrain, however, from referring to them more particularly. When the malady is evidently fatal, it is a wearisome task to chronicle all the symptoms as they appear. Yet in respect to the general question of "Church Establishments," as involved in the Irish Church question, the reception given by the House of Commons and the newspaper press to Mr. Miall's recent motion on the Irish Church is too significant not to be noted.

I do not, indeed, suppose that a definite idea of Independency as their last resort, or their fate, has been suggested to the minds of many clergymen, whatever be their afflictions in the house of their bondage. To some few, though to a few only, of the farthest-seeing, it has, and to numbers it may have appeared “looming in the distance ;” but it is the preparatory experience of wretchedness, and of self-denunciation because of the self-unmanning processes by which they have incurred this wretchedness, that constitutes their general experience, rather than the feeling that a remedy is at hand, which, either by constraint or willingly, it behoves them to consider.

But instances of a subjection which is felt by each party in turn to violate conscience and to be socially degrading, are not the only phenomena in the Church of England that are related to our subject, and that deserve our notice. The large amount of personal independence actually enjoyed by both clergy and laity should be equally included in our survey. And in the case of the clergy, this very experience of much independence both strengthens their desire for more, and makes them cautious when proposing to exchange their Church system for that of the Independents ; the individual freedom

that they now possess, appearing to a great extent in forms in which they look almost in vain for freedom among us.

For however outrageous such exceptional cases as Bishop Hampden's and Mr. Gorham's may be, and although the consideration of these cases has made many hundreds of the clergy aware of bonds that they had not felt previously, it is an undeniable fact, that the personal freedom of the parochial clergy, both in the pulpit and in general parish affairs, is very considerable, and far beyond what is enjoyed by Independent ministers in analogous cases. I apprehend that the theory of the parochial system in both the Church of Rome and that of England, provides a vast scope of free action for the parish priest; and that if the clergy have latterly felt straitened, this has been the consequence either of an exceptional departure from the constitutional moderation of prelatical superintendence, of which I need not cite examples, or of gradual but important changes in constitutional practice. Thus it can hardly be regarded as in accordance with the early constitutional spirit of a hierarchy, that the episcopal *veto* upon a parish clergyman's choice of a curate should be so freely and capriciously

exercised as it has been of late years. The vast increase of non-parochial churches, and the multiplication of clergymen of inferior abilities and attainments, such as are usually employed by Pastoral Aid Societies, together with other kindred circumstances, have also imparted to Episcopal superintendence much more of the aspect of reality than it wore when the territorial system was intact, and the demand for clergymen was regular, and was met with a regular supply through well known channels. Yet while it has been thus demonstrated that prelatical oversight is capacitated for minute, even for microscopic inquisition, it is only in two or three dioceses that the beneficed clergy have as yet felt it to be enslavement. The terror of it, however, is manifest; for notwithstanding the loud demands from a few quarters for Parliamentary interference to compel a more scrutinizing and rigid Episcopal government, the legislature has done little in response; and the independent spirit of English gentlemen, by which that body is eminently pervaded, has revolted from measures which, it is foreseen, would exclude young men of dignity of character from the priesthood.

There remains, then, to the parochial clergy

a vast range for free individuality; and although we may think their liberty incompatible with the liberty of their people, such as not only permits but involves priestliness and lordly bearing, such, therefore, as ill befits a man whose only power should be moral, we should at the same time remember that the possessors of this liberty, when comparing their position with that of Independent ministers, compare it with what seems to them a most dishonourable state of servility and spiritual impotence. Into the correctness of their supposition I shall have another opportunity of inquiring; meanwhile let us recognize the fact, that if not church independence, yet ministerial independence is very dear to thousands of most estimable clergymen; that what they enjoy causes them to deplore their want of more in some particulars, and to dread a diminution of what in these respects they already have; and that when considering whether they can ameliorate their lot, even if willing to surrender all such prerogatives as enthral their people, they shrink from the idea of an Independent Church as known to them, because not willing to concede such prerogatives to the people as would necessarily enthral themselves.

I observe, too, that in the various Presbyterian churches there is a large and an increasing amount of ministerial independence. It is to North Britain, of course, that we look for examples of modern Presbyterianism ; and the notoriously low repute of Independency in most parts of Scotland may at first appear adverse to my position. It is true, indeed, that avowed Independents are very few in that kingdom, and that during the last twenty or five and twenty years the comparative influence of Independency has sunk to a perceptible and an important extent. But a delightful degree of real independence has meanwhile been signally achieved in all the Presbyterian communities for both individual ministers and individual congregations. Occasional instances of oppression and restriction do unquestionably occur ; and the knowledge of existent laws and established precedents, to the maintenance of which within each congregation many other congregations are pledged, is very effective in the prevention of thought, and thus in the perpetuation of unconscious bondage. The evil effects of a bad system are, therefore, perceptible enough to a patient observer ; and however ill Independency has been exemplified, few of the English Independ-

dents who demand a modified Presbyterianism, would prolong the demand after full opportunity of acquainting themselves with the existent Presbyterianism of Scotland. Still, so much has external control over individual ministers and churches been reduced and qualified, that in ordinary times intelligent strangers might spend months in Scotland and not meet with indications of any ; while there are Presbyterian ministers whose personal heroism and noble port of freedom entitle them to a place among the gospel's purest chivalry.

While, then, Independency in Scotland wins few proselytes, a visible approximation to Independency is effected among those who still retain another nominal polity. The spirit of an era is, however, as discernible in a modification of executive action as in a change of statutes ; and it needs no second-sight to foresee whether the distant future of a people will take character and name from their living spirit, or from laws obsolete in part, and in part oft forgotten, and, when remembered, remembered to the grief and shame of many.

In both North Britain and South, the laity, too, evince increased restlessness under the yokes which forbid congregational and personal

independency. In some English Episcopalian circles, and almost throughout all Presbyterian Scotland, there are still painful and humiliating exhibitions of men's subjection to a minister's authority, and especially to the authority of associated ministers and of churches. Nevertheless, it is no such uncommon thing as it once was to forsake the parish church for a district church, or to pass from one Presbyterian congregation to another of the same denomination, or even to one of a different denomination ; or, either among Episcopilians or Presbyterians, for numerous disaffected people to secede in a body, and to become a distinct congregation. And in England, very much more I am sorry to say than in Scotland, every year beholds a strengthening and an expanding determination among laymen, whatever influence may still cripple their personal liberty in things ecclesiastical, to confine mere clerical authority thereto, and on all matters extra-ecclesiastical to meet ministers of every name and grade on the one ground of equal manhood ; relieving education, literature, philosophy, politics, and general philanthropy, from their specific influence.

In all this, now, I see an indication of two admirable tendencies in our national character ;

that to individuality, and that to catholicity or cosmopolitanism. Of the harmony between these I may speak more fully hereafter ; and indeed it is to the former rather than to the latter that the present exigencies of my subject direct me. Yet I willingly refer, while passing, to the fact repeatedly illustrated in the preceding remarks ; that in proportion to the relaxation of the ties binding men to the authority of their minister, their congregation, their denomination, in things spiritual and moral, are their sympathies free and ready to be awakened for other ministers, other churches, other sects, and, indeed, all other individual Christians. This catholicity of feeling has been denied to belong to our national character. And it certainly has been grievously repressed in things ecclesiastical and things spiritual. That it is characteristic of us as a nation, I have, however, not a doubt. It might as well be denied that we are distinguished for personal individuality ; for our individual subjection to authority in Church matters is surely no exemplification of the extremely self-opinionated, headstrong, dogged spirit for which we are famous throughout all regions. If our island-home be specified as necessarily productive of individuality, our mixed blood, our restless and expansive

energy, our countless lines of communication with the east, the west, the antipodes, ought surely to be regarded as antecedent grounds for conjecturing that catholicity also is indigenous among us.

We might, indeed, ascend to a condition of human nature anterior to all nationalism, and infer from what is there observable, that to be independent of all, and to have sympathies uniting each with all, will alike characterize men of every nation in proportion to their experience of a redemption that restores them to their nature's first condition. It is sufficient, however, to advert to the present state of the British people ; and in their acknowledged self-assertion and sense of justice, I see such decided indications of prevailing tendencies, the one to individuality, and the other to catholicity, as are pledges of their ultimate, perhaps their early, self-extrication from those systems and conventionalisms that have hitherto been too successful in depriving men of manhood when rendering them members of a church, and in depriving churches of Christianity in their dealings both with other churches, and with Christian men attached to no church.

It may be expected that I shall refer to the

results of the late census in further evidence of the progress of those principles of which, when applied to a Church, Independency is the clearest expression. And the evidence thus afforded is certainly important, though in one inference drawn from the returns by many Independents, the inference, that Independency itself is rapidly securing the confidence of the nation, I do not at all concur. Accepting the returns as sufficiently accurate for all general purposes, and admitting that the number of Independents, including of course all who personally support the Church system of Independency, by whatever name they are known—admitting, I say, that the number of Independents is at least equal to the previous belief of the most sanguine, I hesitate to conclude from this, either that Independency is in a healthy state, or that the number of its adherents is an index of correspondent social reputation. The number alone proves something ; but had it appeared to me to prove the conclusions now mentioned, I should not have undertaken my present service. It proves, however, that Independency is sufficiently prominent in the country to be observed by all who muse upon the tendencies and the character of church systems ; but it does not prove that Inde-

pendency is as prevalent as it would have been had it been more scripturally and more spiritually conducted ; and it does not account for the secession from Independency of thousands of the better educated children of Independents. It indicates a strong vitality ; but it gives no response to the question, “ Does this vitality exist by means of, or does it exist in spite of, some of the usages and the operations for which Independent churches in general are distinguished ? ” It shows that Independency has actually advanced, and is thus one proof of the spread of Independent principles ; but it affords no satisfaction of its being in such a state as shall attract many of the fugitives who may be expected to be ere very long without a church, or of that larger class of people who, could they but descry a liberal church system, would in the course of the next half-century escape from what gendereth to bondage.

Nevertheless, the total evidence given by the census-tables in proof of the progress of Independent principles in the nation, is even prodigious. For in addition to the number of actual Independents, the important schisms among the Wesleyan Methodists, the old Wesleyan body itself, considered as an excrescence of the Church

of England, the numbers of the congregations called "Isolated," or constituting small sects, and, above all, the new-born voluntaryism in the Church of England itself, all these matters are strikingly significant of a spirit in the nation that rejects, or that bursts out of, whatever interferes with its spontaneity, and that can ultimately domesticate itself in no ecclesiastical system but the Independent.

It may assist our judgment concerning the data that I have now enumerated, and whatever other phenomena might be added to them, if we endeavour to view them from the position of a religious, thoughtful, speculative, and yet practical statesman, deeply and conscientiously interested in church systems ; such a statesman, for instance, as Lord John Russell, or, still more characteristically, Mr. Gladstone. It seems to me impossible that a man like this last mentioned gentleman, whatever be the pressure of the current business on so dignified an official, shall not carefully accumulate before him all such signs of the times as those to which I have adverted, and with candour and sagacity of judgment equal to his care in the collecting of evidence, prognosticate what must be from what is. And I should find it hard to believe that he can

sider the materials at hand for the formation of an opinion respecting the probable future of things ecclesiastical, without desiring to know all the truth about the inner life and operations of Independency as it is, and deeply pondering whether he, or any future minister of state, could ever recommend it to the personal consideration of the sovereign of this empire, or seek by counsel and example to form all the constituent members of the Church of England into Independent churches.

It can be doubted, I suppose, by no one competent to appreciate the matter, that however often and however long the day of account and of revolution may be postponed, the Church of England is destined to undergo a national scrutiny, with a view to modification as the first preliminary to virtual dissolution. Not, perhaps, till the weight of its mass, when in a state of violent agitation, shall threaten to crush both the crown and the cabinet that have undertaken to conserve and to sustain it, will any statesman collect himself for the alternative of allowing its explosive forces to have free play, and endeavouring to direct its elements into new combinations. Yet it must even now make courageous ministers of state feel

grave, and overwhelm the more nervous with enfeebling fears, to see often and yet again of late, in that remarkable clock-face to public opinion, *The Times* newspaper, such a passage as the following, selected not for its strength but for its brevity from a leading article of the 31st of January of the current year. Speaking of this year as the opening of a new period, *The Times* inquires, "When will the Church, too, bow to that rule which in a free and self-governed country"—you will note the epithets "free and self-governed," for they suggest the spirit of Independency—"will, first or last, make the common weal over-rule every other consideration? Such," it is emphatically added, "are the new questions opening upon us." And no one, I think, can read attentively such a document as the famous article on "Church Parties," in a recent number of the *Edinburgh Review*, verifying to himself that it is a correct map of the country that he is studying, without a conviction, simple and entire, that the State Church is hopelessly divided against itself, and comprehends such mutually hostile and destructive elements as presage its inevitable ruin. The date of the final catastrophe, and the agencies that shall effect it, and the first formations that

shall succeed it, no wise man, haply, will allow himself to conjecture ; but that it is sure, and that it is within the ken of as many as, having eyes, will see, and that after it there must be ultimately a prodigious growth of Independency ; —or that there will be many a catastrophe, if not general, yet sufficiently momentous to attract general regard, and that out of each such, whatever else may rise for a time, Independency will come forth as the one production whose self-assertion is sufficient for self-justification, the one, therefore, that is destined to outlive every other ;—this I do not suppose that any man can doubt, who has reflected long and carefully upon all the data, and who is conversant with the leavening power of first principles.*

Let us endeavour, then, to apprehend what a statesman such as I have supposed, such as I believe Mr. Gladstone to be, would regard as *desiderata* in any church system that he could recommend to the people of this country for general adoption, in case of such a revolution in the Church of England, or of such a total downfall of it, as should sever the bonds that attach million to diocesan episcopacy, leaving them at liberty

* Bunsen's recent work on *Signs of the Times* contains much that strongly corroborates all this part of the lecture.

either to subject themselves afresh to it in its enfranchisement from the state, or to select some other ecclesiastical polity.

And I imagine that his first demand would be for a system that could comprehend, and could adapt itself alike to, people of all stations, all degrees of civilization and refinement, all social classes, all varieties of political opinion, and all personal peculiarities whatsoever, which would not exclude a man from general society, or expel him from the country. And surely no man ought to be made to feel that the office in which he renders service to his country, while honoured elsewhere, is dishonoured in the operations of his church. A church should hardly be the only association in which qualifications and accomplishments otherwise found valuable should expose their possessors to dislike, jealousy, or contempt. No man should have cause to say that his political opinions render him unwelcome to the fellowship of any church. Personal peculiarities of mental character, of manners, of pursuits, of pleasures, that necessarily violate no moral principle and offend no moral sentiment, that generally vary according to men's early training and social circumstances, and that are found to be compatible with faith, with spiritual affec-

tions, and with pervading conscientiousness, ought hardly to debar a man from a church's confidence. No church should so conduct itself that the poor, because he is poor, should feel himself excluded by its arrangements from divine ordinances. And no less than the poor ought the rich to feel himself secure in the church from all invidious reflections, and from all treatment that might either corrupt him by flattery, or from ignorance endeavour to restrict his personal freedom. In short, no social restraint should be felt by any individual, in addition to the unceasing obligations of morality, beyond what is necessary for the church's existence as a society, and for the attainment of the ends for which it was constituted.

In the second place, that system would be preferred by the responsible councillor supposed, which, other things being equal, would at once furnish the amplest opportunity for the free study of the Scriptures, and most effectually repress tendencies in its members to become lords over one another's faith. For no man of profound research into the things of God, of wide observation of the varieties of Christian life, and of that respect for others' individuality and freedom which is one of the best proofs of his culti-

vation of his own, and of his consciousness of its value, no such man will expect that any formulæry, or that any denotation of Divine and spiritual things by human language, will exactly correspond to the perceptions of a single thoughtful spirit. We can form no conception of a church, therefore, but of an aggregate of human beings of whom no two can possibly think quite alike on either the more or the less important matters of Divine revelation. Inquiring, then, for a church-system which he may recommend to a Christian people comprising countless varieties of creed, people whom it is hopeless, even were it wise, to endeavour so to arrange that one group of them shall include such as mutually assimilate on one point, and another group such as mutually assimilate on a second point, he will evidently select that system which is at once the most stimulative of thought, the most thoroughly protective of personal freedom, and the most conservative of mutual respect and forbearance among its members, whatever be their diversities of apprehension and opinion.

Seeing, thirdly, that, rejecting all coercion, he must adopt a system that shall be self-supporting, our statesman will require the one that shall combine the strongest inducements to all its mem-

bers to sustain it, with a sufficient guarantee that all things shall be done decently and in order.

And, lastly, inasmuch as the inquirer whom we are imagining shall have dismissed all theories identifying the nation with the church, he will desiderate in his new church-system a principle that shall refrain from absorbing any influences, and from undertaking any responsibilities, that might in time enable, and, in the opinion of many, oblige the church to leave, or to enlarge, its own original sphere, and to become the general educator, for instance, or the local or the national economist, or the legislator, or the judge, whether inferior or supreme, in matters civil, political, or criminal. He will look for a church whose sphere of action shall be exclusively man as a religious being, whose instrument shall be nothing but the Scriptures, and which shall attain, not an advantage for some more distant end, but its proper and last end, in the gradual invigoration and adornment of the spiritual and moral character of its several members ; he will expect that the fruits of the Spirit thus produced shall be left to the sole responsibility of those who severally bear them, for such manifestation and such diverse service as social life in its numerous departments

supplies abundant opportunities for affording ; and he will consequently desire that no requisition be laid upon a church-organization for the opening up of any such opportunities on the outside of its own peculiar sphere.

Comprehensiveness correspondent to all the distinctions in the social and civil life ; catholicity exclusive of no variety of Christian faith ; the power of self-perpetuation ; and such respect for other institutions and agencies as shall refrain from all intrusion into their departments ; such are the chief *desiderata* which, I think, a man to whom the eyes both of a court and of a nation would turn for guidance amidst ecclesiastical revolutions, would require in that church-system which only he could confidently recommend them to adopt.

It is notorious, now, that Independency professes to possess these *desiderata*. Perhaps no exposition of its system can be found which does not protrude them, if not by name yet by implication, among its chief recommendations. It must be acknowledged, too, that a church, worthy to be called an Independent church, ought to be thus characterized. The fact, however, and neither the profession nor the obligation, *the fact* is that which both practical statesmen and the common sense of the general public will

chiefly regard when deciding on the merits of rival systems. A theory may look specious while not tried, and especially while no opportunity to try it has been given. But when tried, as Independency has been in some thousands of instances, and in numerous varieties of circumstances, and, if not hitherto in this country without hindrances, yet in subjection to only such hindrances as have warned its supporters to be the more circumspect and particular in their conduct of the experiment, the bystanders who have been summoned to observe the issue, may not unfairly prepare themselves to pronounce upon the system according to the results of these attempts to establish it. To them it must appear too late for us to reiterate the watch-cry, "Principles, Principles!" if these principles, after long and various trial, are found to be ill-adapted to human nature in its actual circumstances. They will send us back to our Bibles for fresh principles, as the geologists did, in order that, if our deductions from the Scriptures are not found in harmony with the acknowledged works and ways of God, we may deduce afresh; the facts of human nature, as the facts of the earth, being unalterable. If men, from the force of conscientious conviction, not unaccompanied with the energy springing from the sense of

oppression, not to speak of the stimulus of emulation, if men thus animated cannot, after more than two centuries' endeavours, so rectify the operations and developments of a church-system as to demonstrate that it is what they profess it to be, it ought not to surprise them that spectators call the grounds of their faith into question, and inquire for another and a more excellent way.

It becomes, then, a pointed and an urgent question, whether the Independent churches are prepared for such an investigation into the operations and the fruits of their polity, as seems likely to be henceforth more generally made throughout the country than it has been wont to be. Independents usually speak very confidently, and even defiantly, of the scriptural authority of their churches, of the peculiar adaptation of their polity to human nature, of its flexibility to all social circumstances, of its pre-eminent spirituality, and of its ultimate satisfactoriness in all respects when legitimately exemplified. Had they not challenged examination, they would have been subjected to it in such times as are now in dawn ; having demanded it, they will not be suffered to escape the scrutiny. And it is a propitious sign, that no few among them have

for a long time striven to arouse their churches to a consideration of their state. Almost every fair occasion, and, perhaps, more than one not fair, has for several years been taken for discussing their failures and their various evils in the audience of their most prominent representatives ; and more than one solemn convention of those who " seemed to be somewhat " has been held specially for this purpose. Pamphlets, too, have begun their death-tick around us, as if prognosticating our decay ;* while there are few periodical publications that take note of our condition and do not outpour alarming, though, perhaps, discordant warnings, if so be we may arise and live, to the disappointment of the harpies that would feed upon our carcase. This activity of self-vigilance, I say, is favourable ; and it may be expected that I shall animadvert on the complaints and the recommendations that thus abound. And to some few of them an indirect regard will be occasionally given in the following lectures ; although having no desire for conflict, I must decline, but with respect not scorn, to review them professedly and in detail.

* When this was delivered several pamphlets had been recently published, two in Manchester alone, on the decline thought to be visible in Independency.

One protest, it is true, I must offer with a degree of peremptoriness, against an assumption distinguishing the more important part of the remonstrances that I have seen addressed to the Independent churches. It is the assumption, that those who forsake Independency are in general actuated by worldly motives. I do not believe it. In respect of almost all such deserters as I have known, including, I apprehend, many hundreds, I am sure that it is untrue, or but very partially true; I fear that it is calumnious and vindictive. I regret their desertion, and most poignantly; regretting it in part for their own sake; regretting it still more for the sake of their country. Would they all have remained, and done the part that their convictions prompted, I doubt not that Independency would long ago have conformed itself, if not to all, yet to the more important of their wishes. Yet who can wonder that young people, feeling strong objections to much in the operations of Independency, taught by observation from their youth that Independency was changeless and inflexible, knowing few persons, if any, with whom they could candidly confer, and shrinking from all controversial conflict, who can wonder that they

should embrace such opportunities as life presented to connect themselves quietly with another system; one which, even if in their esteem productive of some evil consequences to general interests, yet appeared to them permissive of an amount of personal liberty from which they were debarred by Independency, but to which they thought themselves admitted by Christ? We praise neither their departure from one church nor their election of another. We deplore, and, as brethren, we condemn both. But chiefly we condemn, first, the administration that excluded from a fold of Christ's, or that debarred from entrance into it, young and inexperienced, but sincere and not unlowly though independent spirits, that would gladly have matured their thoughts, and that might have much modified their ways, in the fellowship of the church, but that could not, and that would not, uplift a human yoke and carry it in the name of Christ; and, secondly, the spirit that, as they seek a church that shall intermeddle less with matters for which they believe themselves responsible to God only, pursues them with the cry that they are worldly; their own purpose being simply that which alone justifies Independency itself, the purpose to be in bondage to no man, and to

give place by compulsion to impositions from brethren, no, not for an hour.

With this one protest, then, I would almost altogether withdraw my attention from those who have preceded me in the path of reform ; my wish being not to oppose fellow-labourers, but only to obtain a place for the exhibition of my own thoughts. For some others of us would answer also our part ; we also would show our opinion. We have waited for the words of others ; we have given ear to their reasons while they searched out what to say. Therefore let it not be imputed to us for presumption, or for aught worse than loyalty to truth, and fidelity to brotherhood, if in these circumstances we, or any other, say, "Hearken to us also." If we expose errors to view, it will be as those who once wandered in the same, or as those who would be helpers of their brethren's joy, if it be possible ; but if it be not, would remember still that we are brethren. Let us not be met, then, with the complaint that we are revealing what for love's sake should be concealed. We shall reveal nothing but what is either essential to Indepen-dency or accidental ; what in either case ought to be divulged for the truth's sake. For that which is essential to it, and that of which it is

capable when legitimately developed, ought not to be confounded with that which, however tenaciously adhesive, is extrinsic, conventional, after the commandments and traditions of men, and not after Christ. Those who would know what Independent churches really are, ought to be aided and not hindered in their inquiries ; and that which is necessary in order that a church may be independent, should be kept carefully distinct from whatever actually characterizes Independent churches in general, though it need not characterize any.

Meanwhile, if there be aught among us of which we are ashamed, to bring it into publicity is the surest preliminary to the deliverance of us from it. And inasmuch as all that is done in Independent churches is done avowedly, and with much profession, for the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, there surely can be nothing that we would defend and maintain, but what we of all men should be the very last to repress from public cognizance. The plea, that no one beyond ourselves has a right to inquire into our affairs, may be valid enough when urged against those who, while not of us, would rule over us ; but it is worthless when adduced in excuse of the concealment of what we call “our ways in Christ”

from such as would determine whether it be right for them also to walk with us ; and it is unjust when employed in support of the outcry of treachery against such as, like myself, have no desire but this only, that our deeds, if we do evil, may be reproved, and if we do truth, may be made manifest that they are wrought in God.

It is little, indeed, that one man, or that a few men, can without romance expect to accomplish in a matter such as this, when not required to devote to it their chief care. By a few lectures we may do nothing that shall even be appreciable, towards guiding the inquiries of the general public when musing on the probable future of Independency. We have certainly not the faintest expectation of producing a visible reformatory movement in even a single church. We aim only to expand the whole theme of the present aspect and the capabilities of Independency before the minds of such thoughtful men as may favour us with audience ; to encourage them to keep themselves personally pure in all new ecclesiastical movements, from whatsoever causes the truth that there is in Independency to be evil spoken of ; and thus to do some little to the formation of a just public opinion on these matters. And if, because we

aim thus, we be reproached in any wise by those by whom we ought rather to be commended, we shall sorrow for the unjust more than for the injured, and of the wrong done to us shall say only, "This is my grief, and I must bear it."

But as it is not in unbrotherly reproach or rivalry, so neither is it in unbrotherly alarm of an ungenerous reception of our efforts, that we discharge the present duty. For we have no fear for Independency, and, therefore, none for the prevalent spirit of its children. Communications from all parts of the country assure us that self-inquiry is in exercise among the Independents, and render our hope eager and pleasurable, that as external scrutiny becomes the keener, there shall be the less for it to censure, and the more for it to admire. Churches with precedents extending backwards through many generations will not, it is likely, evince much reformatory energy. But new communities need not embarrass themselves by adopting the traditions of their neighbours; and much gradual change may be anticipated in the aspect of even those churches which cling the most tenaciously to the habits of the past. Already, indeed, are there examples, to a greater or less extent, of all those ecclesiastical proprieties to which I shall

call more particular attention in the ensuing lectures. These witnesses, too, exert an influence that is extensively and often deeply felt. Meanwhile, among those members of our churches, and those attendants on the ministry that our churches provide, who see more than others of general society, and share more largely in the good specific characteristics of our times, there is a vast amount of vague, but never dissipated feeling, that Independency must adopt new measures, and must inspire, indeed, another spirit, would it fully avail itself of its present opportunities for progress, and be found worthy to enjoy opportunities still more propitious. These are men, too, not willing, as thousands have been who have felt the like antipathy to much that characterizes ordinary Independency, to desert its standard, and find a refuge from its minor evils in the comprehensive evil, the State Church; thus shunning what annoyed them personally by repairing to what injured millions, and was by nature in opposition to truth. The disaffected of whom I speak are men of principles too clear, and of views too wide, to be thus selfish; although to Independency as it is they feel it impossible to give their hearts. Let them, then, study its first principles; let them ponder well the Scrip-

tures. Also let them have faith in God, and faith in Christ. Let them thus acquire strength and courage to obey the truth. And we doubt not that, if faithful hereunto, they will enjoy such supporting and co-operative sympathy as shall suffice for their occasions; while as those who work a work of God, they will have full warrant to believe their work accepted by Him. It is in the hope that I shall in some measure aid this class of Independents to give definiteness to their conceptions, and decision and vigour to their aims, that I have been invited, and that I have undertaken to deliver these lectures; and it is their attendance in particular that I respectfully request at the somewhat minute exhibition that I intend to make of both the ordinary workings of Independency, and the just idea, as it seems to me, of a Church of Christ.

LECTURE II.

INDEPENDENCY AS IT IS.

In the last lecture, after some explanations of my undertaking and my wishes, a brief description of the general bearing of the nation towards Independency, and an exhibition of the chief features of such a church-system as is likely to be required in course of time throughout the country, I alluded to grounds of hope, that when the public mind shall become more gravely inquisitive into ecclesiastical matters, Independency will be better prepared for the scrutiny, and, therefore, for general adoption, than it is at present. Among these grounds of hope I mentioned the fact, that many among the best known Independents have called the attention of their brethren to what they deem existent and important evils in our churches. For if introspection be once vigorously commenced, it is not likely to terminate without a thorough reformation of whatever requires change.

But while appreciating the motives and the fidelity of these fraternal censors, I have seldom been able to concur in their opinions. The reforms advocated by them are for the most part divisible into two classes, which may be called, for distinction's sake, the Democratic and the Spiritual. It is not in my purpose, however, to describe fully these two schools of opinion; though I may say, in justification of my nomenclature, that what I would call the Democratic school is remarkable, among other things, for its desire that a system of mutual exhortation among the members of a church should supersede, to a great extent, the pastor's preaching, and for its tendency to use the church-relation so as to interfere with the natural laws of social relations and distinctions; and that what I would call the Spiritual school demands more caution in the admission of members to a church, a clear expression of a church's disapprobation of many public and social amusements, a church's insisting on a more rigid abstinence by its members from what the brethren of this school regard as Sabbath-desecration, and, if not church censure, yet such pastoral and other private admonition and rebuke, as shall tend to prevent close application to business, and the accumulation of much wealth.

I find little, now, that is said by the representatives of either of these schools, from which I do not decidedly dissent; the reform which, in my own opinion, is required among us, being such rather as may, perhaps, be designated Administrative. There may be something in common, and there undoubtedly is, among the three classes of reformers whom I have thus ventured to denominate; and I beg to be understood as not employing those titles either in arrogance or in any other offensive spirit, but merely for the sake of suggesting a conspicuous tendency or aim for which the reforming opinions of three classes of equally attached adherents of Independency are severally, I think, distinguished. For it may prevent misconception and undesirable speculation concerning the ultimate bearing of my observations, when I thus early declare that it is the faulty administration of Independency, rather than the specific lack of either a more spiritual tone or a more democratic feeling in the Independent churches, that will alone, I believe, prevent our church-system from becoming the popular, not to say the universal church-system in this country.

But I shall not base my conclusions upon extreme instances of administrative incapacity;

though I have known many such. For, passing by cases in which all the parties concerned are now dead, and cases beyond the boundaries of the county of Lancaster, I have known more than one Pastor debarred by force from entrance into his chapel; I have known an outcry raised against another while in the act of entering the pulpit; I have known another read the Toleration Act at a church-meeting, and then send for a constable to arrest more than forty members, the majority of his church ; I have known the military to be summoned on the Lord's day to quell confusion in an Independent chapel ; I have heard a county magistrate declare that at an election of a pastor in his church, a church in a large town that had been esteemed a model church, the private intimidation, the virtual bribery, the corrupt canvassing, the fierceness, the vindictiveness, of which the partisans of the candidates were guilty, were such as he had supposed confined to the baser part of the agents in municipal or parliamentary elections ; and I am informed that within the last few months a serious, and, it is feared, a fatal schism has occurred in a rural church, in consequence of a pastor's resolution to supersede a custom at meetings for prayer, according to which any member engaged to lead in prayer selected

and read out a hymn for singing. But it is not from extravagances such as these that I would show the necessity of administrative reform in Independent churches ; although there have been many more such outrageous doings than what Independents in general perhaps have known ; and a still greater number of instances only second in respect of grossness to those which I have specified.

But as no candid opponent of Independency would rest his antagonism to it on such facts as these, I would make no further use of them than to suggest two considerations ; the first, that although the knowledge of such abominations may be restricted almost to the immediate locality in which they occur, and may be soon lost even in this locality, yet a traditional prejudice against Independency as a generator of factions and strifes must be extensively maintained in districts thus polluted, and in part accounts for the comparatively slow progress of our church-system in many places ; and the other, that when we occasionally hear of similar outrages in the Established church, we should be cautious in imputing to a system what it is possible may be due to nothing but the mental obliquity or the moral corruption of individuals. If not modesty, and brotherly consider-

ration for that of which our neighbours are themselves ashamed, yet should our exposure to retaliation restrain us from all savage methods of ecclesiastical controversy.' For neither ministerial immorality nor popular disorderliness is peculiar to any one sect ; even as it is quite certain that no ecclesiastical polity can be devised, of which men of evil passions cannot become first the conductors, and at last the perverters and the ruin.

It is not, then, to the universally reprobated abuses of Independency that I shall refer for illustrations of that need of administrative reform which I believe to prevail among us ; it is rather to its acknowledged and most dearly cherished usages. And that these may be fairly exhibited, it is desirable that, in the first place, I should represent the ordinary formation and growth, what we may term, in one word, the physiology of an Independent church.

Circumstances having occurred, such as suggest the advisableness of a new church, members of other churches who have privately concurred in adopting the suggestion, obtain dismissory certificates of Christian character from the churches with which they have been connected, and, under the temporary presidency of some neighbouring pastor, proceed to constitute the new society.

From this time they will secure two sermons, with the performance of divine worship, every Sunday; a prayer-meeting, at which two or more of themselves will lead in prayer, in the midst of the week; a monthly church-meeting for the transaction of business; and the observance of the Lord's Supper on the Sunday following the church-meeting. As soon as it is convenient, they proceed to choose a pastor for themselves, and deacons. If they have not already secured a permanent place of meeting, they now take measures for the erection of one, and of a school-house, especially seeking contributions for these purposes from all who are likely to frequent the services in the chapel. The property thus acquired is vested in trustees, sometimes comprising none but members of the church, but more frequently consisting in part, if not altogether, of well-known members of other churches.

The trust-deed usually provides that the property shall be held by a church holding certain views of divine things, and conducting themselves according to the Independent polity; those views and this polity being either specified in the deed, or determinable from documents to which the deed refers. Peculiar conditions are sometimes introduced respecting the choice of a

pastor, the appropriation of seat-rents, modes for the transacting of business, and other matters of detail ; but of these minutiae there is no need that I should give particular instances. The sittings in the chapel or church, however, when completed, are commonly let for fixed sums of money, varying according to the commodiousness of the sittings, to whatever parties may apply for them. The money thus collected is legally at the trustees' disposal, first for the defrayment of any remaining charges on the premises, and then for the church's use in the support of the pastor, or in providing for other necessary aids. Practically, however, the pew-rents are usually set aside, in whole or in part, for the pastor's support, public collections taking place for the remaining expenses, and private subscriptions completing what may still be required for either. But it is considered of great importance that no debt should remain upon the premises ; the church, while using property at all encumbered, being popularly represented as like a private man in debt. Meanwhile, the choice of the pastor and of the deacons, the admission and the expulsion of members, and, in general, all matters of business whatsoever, depend on the votes of the majority of those members of the church who

may be present at a meeting duly convened ; particular provisions, as already intimated, being occasionally made in the trust-deed, so as to ensure that the choice of the pastor shall depend upon a real majority of the whole church, if not also upon a majority of the tenants of sittings, and the formal approval of the trustees. All who are thus elected into the church, or into office in it, are chosen for life ; that is, during good behaviour. But what constitutes good or bad behaviour is usually left undetermined ; unless that, in the case of an officer, a marked departure from the creed approved in the trust-deed, or a violation of temperance or of chastity, or that, in the case of a private member, a more important renunciation of the adopted faith, or a more aggravated offence against good manners, is at times declared to be a disqualification for office or for membership respectively. And if no legal provision is made to this effect, the conduct pursued when an accusation is preferred, is generally, I believe, in accordance with this statement ; some other immoralities also being deemed sufficient causes for censure, or for expulsion both from office and from membership.

With regard to future additions to the church it is sufficient to say, that any person desirous to

be a member of it first satisfies the pastor of his fitness, and is then proposed by him to the church ; that two deacons, or other members of experience, are now appointed to converse with him for the sake of similar satisfaction ; that a letter to the church is in some cases required, in which also the candidate narrates his religious history, and describes his views of doctrine and discipline ; and that after a month's interval, if these various testimonials to his faith and consistency are approved by the church, he is admitted to their fellowship. Members of other churches who seek admission, are usually received on the sole ground of a letter of commendation from the church that they are leaving, that is, if this church is an Independent or a Baptist church : otherwise, they are commonly subjected to the examination and probation already described, although in some cases the procedures are abridged.

It is worthy of note that, in the selection of a pastor, recourse is usually had either to colleges instituted for the express purpose of preparing young men for the pastorate in Independent churches, and governed in general accordance with the trust-deeds of the chapels, or to pastors already in office, but previously educated in those

colleges. Hence, unless at what may be called Missionary Stations, there are not many Independent pastors who are not largely indebted for their qualifications to institutions supported either altogether or chiefly by the donations of others, and conducted in harmony with the churches which support them. The great predominance of pastors thus educated does not, however, arise from a strong prejudice against men whose qualifications have been otherwise acquired, so much as from the paucity of qualified men of this latter class. As myself of this latter class, it would be unjust not to acknowledge the fraternal feeling generally manifested towards them; while at the same time I must draw attention to the fact, that there are very few Independent pastors in positions of much influence who have not, either from necessity or from choice, received their education, and usually their maintenance while in course of education, as a gift, not from personal friends, but from public bodies pledged to a particular system of both doctrine and ecclesiastical discipline.

The formal union of a pastor and an Independent church, called his ordination, is seldom effected unless with religious services conducted by the pastors of other churches; and though

elaborate declarations are often made to the effect that this arrangement is adopted merely for the sake of spiritual edification, it is questionable whether a deviation from the ordinary routine would not generally be regarded by Independents as disorderly, if not schismatical.

A church, too, and a pastor, would be exposed, at least for a time, to some, I think to much, painful suspicion among their brethren, should they not become organized with other churches in the same county, or other territorial division, if not for many matters of common interest, yet at all events for the pecuniary assistance of those among them who might not be able to support their own pastors, and for the diffusion of their polity within the limits of their union. The pastor, and two or more delegates chosen from each church, usually constitute the chief executive power for the management of the affairs of each county-union; and from their decision there is no appeal.

During the last twenty years, moreover, this tendency in the Independent churches to ally themselves together, has been more remarkably developed. A union has been proposed of all the Independent churches of England and Wales, under the designation of the Congrega-

tional Union of England and Wales ; and the body that bears this name has also established corporate correspondence with like bodies in Scotland, Ireland, and the United States.

The objects proposed by this organization may be described as, in general, like those of the county unions : such missionary operations, for instance, in parts in which our own language is spoken, as could not be conducted by the more limited unions ; and such other measures as seem likely to further whatever interests are common to all the churches. And there can be no doubt that so long as this important association lives, whatever be the number of its members, its character and its proceedings will be closely scrutinized by all who study Independency, as, much more than any other single group of phenomena, the elements from which their judgment of Independency should be determined.

I shall suppose, therefore, that the church whose growth we are considering becomes a member of this union ; although it is proper to add an expression of my belief that it would be difficult to state, to the satisfaction of the parties principally concerned, the extent to which the Independent churches are actual members of this union. For its constitution has been so

largely modified, not to say completely revolutionized, during its yet very brief existence, as to leave the large majority of the churches in an ambiguous position. Indeed it is now no longer a mere union of churches at all. It was at first an association of county or other territorial unions. To obviate certain great inconveniences, it was then so modified as to permit individual churches to adhere to it by direct junction. Finding that its funds were ill supplied, it ultimately adopted, about three years ago, a pecuniary qualification, so that no church, unless it pay a small annual sum, is now either directly or indirectly a member of it; while at the same time it allowed both pastors and other parties to join it as individuals on the payment of a personal subscription. But according to this last change, the associated churches are in reality comparatively few; although as many churches, it is supposed, are not yet aware of their legal severance from the union, while it is hoped by the executive that a large number, perhaps almost all, that have not qualified, will yet pay the annual contribution, it would not perhaps be allowed by the friends of the union to be a fair account of its strength, were we to say that after twenty years of strenuous exertion, the

employment of nearly all the most popular and the most powerful Independent ministers and laymen in its advocacy through both the pulpit and the press, and the expenditure by its members of an immense amount of money in attending to its business, it has succeeded in enlisting into its ranks but a very small minority of those whom it has addressed. Yet this is the present truth;* although I believe it to be almost everywhere assumed, that nearly all the Independent churches are members of this union; and although its title is such, and its officials so deport themselves, as to justify the assumption. I need only add, that while the chief executive authority of this national union is constructed similarly to that of the county unions, its central committee has necessarily much greater power than any committee of these; the extent of country occupied by its constituents not allowing their close attendance on its business.

Of the Congregational Union of England and Wales, then, I assume that our new church with its pastor becomes a member. And we are bound

* The foregoing passage was written, it must be remembered, in the year 1854. The union may have multiplied its members since that time. I do not know. I believe, however, that the members are not much more numerous at the present time, June, 1856.

to suppose, also, that either by its own action, or with its tacit concurrence and material support, a Sunday School is established in connexion with it for the religious instruction of any young people, though chiefly of the children of the poorer classes, who may be induced to attend it. The affairs of this school will be conducted by a committee chosen either by the teachers or by the church : and it is not unlikely that Day-schools may be subsequently added to their cares. Periodical collections will also be made for the London Missionary Society, and for two or three other kindred associations ; occasional collections will also be introduced for societies of inferior importance ; and in addition to the deacons' distribution of the money collected at the Lord's Supper for the relief of the poorer members of the church, other means will in all probability be adopted in course of time for similar objects ; while as collectors, members of committees, secretaries, treasurers, and presidents of various societies formed out of the church, or affiliated to it, for some or other religious or philanthropic purposes, all its members, and, in the less select offices, all its supporters who are not members, may soon find themselves as extensively engaged as they can possibly desire to be.

In this sketch of the rise and growth to maturity of an ordinary Independent church, I have endeavoured to exhibit mere every-day facts without exaggeration or distortion, and in a not unfriendly light. My wish has been to say nothing but what an advocate of the existent state of things might say, if asked to describe the customary process by which an Independent church rises, and is advanced to reputation. I can suppose the inquiries ready, therefore : " And if you support Independency at all, what can you advance against such an exemplification of it as you have presented ? What is there in all this that is not dictated by experience ? at least, can anything important be altered without affecting the security of orthodox Independent churches ? And though occasionally, through the corruption or the indiscretion of individuals, such a church as has been depicted may evince gross mismanagement, or may exhibit gross misconduct, is this a sufficient ground for general complaints of Independency, or for proposals to revolutionize a system resulting from the expérience of ages, and endeared by many pleasurable associations ? " These inquiries, it is evident, suggest the exact point for discussion ; and to it, therefore, I now address myself : the first important matter that

it involves being the mode in which such ecclesiastical machinery as I have represented works for the production of the given result, an established and a flourishing Independent church.

But while describing the particular movements of an Independent church, in order that their real character and all their external effects may be rightly appreciated, it is necessary that we keep in mind a recognised standard. It will be sufficient, however, for my present purpose, if I remind you of Independents' popularly understood professions, not to say boasts, that they hold Christian fellowship with all believers, that they are subject to no creed of human framing, that they plead for nothing but what is authorized in the New Testament, that they maintain the right of private judgment, that neither the pastor nor the church has any warrant to impose what the Lord Jesus has not enjoined, that no church is subject to any external control, and that conscience must be obeyed at any hazard.

I believe that few people competent to speak upon the matter would deny that Independents give sufficient cause to attribute these propositions to them; and it is in the light of such propositions, as well as with the recollection of the *desiderata* that I enumerated in the last lecture

as required in a church-system fit for general adoption throughout the country, social comprehensiveness, namely, spiritual catholicity, power of self-perpetuation, and respectful independence of every other institution, it is in the midst of these associations that I proceed to describe the inner life of Independency as it is. But in exposing those workings and results of our ordinary ecclesiastical machinery which are seldom regarded in their aggregate, or unless in very slow detail, by any eye but a pastor's, I must necessarily employ a rather diffuse particularization. I shall, of course, endeavour to prevent your feeling weary; yet I must beg you to remember that my case depends on facts which are individually minute, and which become powerful only because countless.

Few men, now, could look attentively at an Independent church, without noticing the existence of a class of people in connexion with it, who occupy an altogether anomalous position. I refer to those who are commonly known as "the congregation," distinct from the church; that is, such seat-holders as are not members of the church. That a name should be applied to the aggregate of such persons, and that, too, a name of such importance, "The Congregation,"

which name is in truth but another translation of the word commonly translated "Church" by writers on ecclesiastical matters, this, I think, is a very significant circumstance. It does not follow, indeed, that those who are thus designated are formed into an organization, or that they act in a corporate capacity; yet they constitute a recognised class of people, and they hold, if an indefinite, yet a very important relation to the church. Occasionally they are even acknowledged in trust-deeds, specific provisions requiring their concurrence in the choice of a pastor, or in other matters; though it is more usual for the church either to pretend ignorance of their existence, or else to convene them in mere courtesy on occasions on which the expression of their wishes might be of consequence. Practically, however, the congregation exerts an influence seldom much less potent, and often very much more potent, than that of the church; and I think it quite worth our while to inquire into the origin, the action, and the consequences of such a state of things. It cannot be regarded as pure Independency. It is hardly likely to strike any one as theoretically a desirable arrangement; and I do not myself think that the effects of it are so good as to render

its perpetuation expedient. Yet no church can publicly meet for divine worship and the study of divine things, without liability to the admixture with themselves of some who are not prepared to enter into their community. Of these, members of their own families alone are likely, in some cases, to outnumber the church; and if when the apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians there was a known attendance of inquirers at meetings of the church, the like must be much more probable where Christianity is generally respected. Every one knows, however, that such inquirers do not fully correspond to those whom we commonly call "the congregation." For the sake of maintaining a theory we may speak of them as if they did, and a small proportion of them actually may; but in addition to these, and to the young children of members, there is generally a large number of regular hearers, and, in some instances, a majority of the aggregate attendants, between whom and the church there is often little, if any, perceptible difference, except only that the church partake the Lord's Supper, and the congregation do not. For public opinion, the wishes of all churches, and a general desire throughout the nation to bring the mind into frequent association with divine things

amidst such circumstances as at the same time awaken the best human sympathies, all combine in Britain to induce men, though constituents of no church, yet to attend regularly where provision is made for the nourishment and the expression of Christian piety.

An intelligent observer, not previously acquainted with Independency, might even visit the homes of a hundred church-members, being householders, and converse freely with these individuals themselves, and then maintain similar intercourse with the same number of the like class in "the congregation," and be ultimately at a loss to determine on what scriptural ground the former should unite in the Lord's Supper and the latter not.* There would be found,

* This passage has been much misunderstood; the sayings being imputed to me, that no difference in honour of "the church," except the one that is mentioned, can ever be perceived between any number of church-members and the same number of "the congregation," both taken indiscriminately, and that the latter body comprises as many good men as the former. I have printed what I said to the letter. It may not be lucid; but I do not see that it includes such statements as those imputed to me; while to those which it makes, and which only it was designed to make, I adhere. For I meant that in London or Manchester, or in a large rural district, including many small towns and villages, the supposed stranger, after visiting so many church-members as to form a fair idea of the religion in "the

perhaps, in the houses of the church-members viewed in the aggregate, a more frequent and more regular performance of family-worship, more care to instruct the children on the Sunday in the Scriptures or in catechisms and hymns, a closer attention to such a routine of engagements on the Sunday as should occupy the largest possible portion of time in what pass as religious exercises, a more stern treatment of a few of the social vices, a more rigid abstinence from amusements in the company of families differently trained, a more prevalent determination to introduce references to spiritual concerns amidst all

church," might then find as good religion among people belonging to "the congregation." I did not say that "the congregation" as a body is equal to "the church" as a body, or that number for number is equal, in respect of religious life and character; nor did my subject require me to speak or to think of the point. My position is, that in our "congregations" there is a large and recognisable class of people who are fully equal in religious power and fruits to the average of the church-members. My own observation would have warranted even stronger expressions; but I had no wish to introduce disputable matter. I could have made similar assertions, too, respecting the reverse; that is, respecting the existence of immorality among church-members (supposing meanness, deceit, backbiting, malice, and such like, and not sensual outbreaks only, to be immoral) quite equal to any immorality in "the congregation;" but neither on this point did the exigencies of my subject require the expression of an opinion.

varieties of occupation and all subjects of discourse, and a much stronger dread of all sentiments ordinarily deemed to be heretical, and of all practices ordinarily deemed to be inconsistent with a Christian profession, in the particular church or churches of which these individuals were members.

Granting, now, that in each of these instances there is something admirable, even though the good be disproportionately exaggerated, and though often it be deficient in genial kindliness, yet on the other hand I do not think that there would be found among the church-members, allowing for occasional exceptions, the same degree of intelligent apprehension of all the bearings of a spiritual truth, or of care for the general culture of the faculties, or of exemplariness in all those great moral duties and social functions which are obligatory irrespective of the specific requirements of a Christian profession, or of superiority to the smaller immoralities of temper, censoriousness, suspicion, and parsimoniousness, or of freedom from sectarianism, arrogant dogmatism, and ostentation of piety, or of general sympathy with either God in nature, and the sublimer schemes of Providence, or man in those experiences of life which are not distinctly spiritual, or of what is usually

suggested when we speak of sense, that is, sagacity and sound judgment; of these things I say that I do not believe that there would be found among the church-members in general, a degree equal to that which would be discovered in many members of "the congregation;" while of what we may allow to be characteristically admirable in the church-members, I have seen equal exemplifications in "the congregation;" and surely quite as luminous illustrations of the supporting and the generally purifying power of a Christian faith.

Even of spirituality as opposed to worldliness, frequently regarded as the great peculiarities of "the church" and "the congregation" respectively, if by these terms we will only understand what the Scriptures denote, it would not be easy to substantiate the church's exclusive, or even very pre-eminent possession of the former. If we determine to expose to the opprobrium of worldliness, a few practices or appearances which we arbitrarily, and without either authority from Scripture or support from first principles, regard as signs of carnality, or of an undecided state of heart towards religion, we shall then have cause enough, perhaps, to regard "the congregation" as of the world. But if by world-

liness we mean that state of mind in which the various businesses of life, whether those pertaining to things secular or those pertaining to things ecclesiastical, are performed without regard to the presence and the nature and the will of the Most High, and to the relation between our character of soul throughout all, and our future and eternal condition ; if, therefore, covetousness, that fruitful root, is worldliness, and if to receive honour one of another is worldliness, and if all self-seeking is worldliness, and if all dissimulation is worldliness, then I say that not many a church ought to feel itself justified in saying to "the congregation," "We are the temple of the Lord, and are holier than ye." For although there may be, and I wish not to deny it, although there may be some slight advantage in this matter in the church's favour, yet it does not strike me, nor do I believe that it would strike any one who would look comprehensively, and take nothing for granted, that the advantage is sufficient to justify discriminative appellations, such as "the church" and "the world;" and would we only bear in mind the church's professions, I doubt if we could ever witness the application of such appellations to "the church" and "the congregation," without either the pun-

gency of self-conviction and a gush of generous sympathy for those who are disparaged, or a self-complacency and high-mindedness that might make angels shudder.

There is still, alas ! a world that lieth in wickedness, and there is a church that is not of the world, even as Christ was not of the world. That only which I deny is, that any Independent church, or that any visible church, is justified by fact in regarding itself as so included in the latter, and "the congregation" as so included in the former, that designations suggestive of essential differences of spiritual character and relations, such as "the church" and "the world," ought to be applied to them by way of distinction. For I repeat that often there is little, if any, perceptible difference between the real spirituality of the church and that of the congregation, and that seldom, if ever, is the difference such as to be strongly characteristic. Indeed, after making extensive observations with this particular reference, I have come to the conclusion, that of the congregation the number is but small who, without any change from what they are, or would they only make some slight concession in points of conduct involving neither doctrine nor morality, would not be gladly welcomed into the church if only

they desired to join it; although so long as they do not join it they are subject to the disrepute of being men of the world.

It becomes, then, an interesting question, What is the cause of the anomalous state of things that we are considering? Or, in other words, how is it that the attendance of young persons and inquirers into Christianity at a church's meetings, has issued in the continuous attendance of a people called "the congregation," frequently, perhaps generally, more numerous than the church itself, and often scarcely distinguishable from the church, or not distinguishable to their discredit, unless by their non-participation of the Lord's Supper? But without undertaking to reply to the question historically, it may be sufficient if I present a summary of what I have ascertained by somewhat wide inquiry to be the chief objections entertained by members of "the congregation," and other people, against entering into an Independent church.*

* In the lecture as delivered, the last part of this sentence was as follows; "if I repeat answers given to me by people whom I believe to be fair representatives of classes, in whose intelligence and truth I have the fullest desirable confidence, and whom I have asked for the reasons of their continuance in the congregation." And this was followed by seventeen extracts from either letters to myself, or notes taken by me immediately

First, then, it is pleaded that the trust-deeds by which the enjoyment of property is secured to Independent churches, are for the most part as objectionable as articles for subscription. If a deed secures property to men on certain conditions, none but people who observe the conditions ought to enjoy the property. Whether papal traditions, or whether Independents' views of what is taught in the Scriptures, are specified in the trust-deed as what shall be believed, or sanctioned, by the holders of the property, every member of the church is bound by truth and integrity, if not by his sign-manual, to renounce the property when he no longer believes what is prescribed. Many people, therefore, who refuse to subscribe, or to sanction other men's subscrip-

after conversation with the parties to whom I alluded. But these seventeen replies were only distinct specimens of a much larger number that I had received; and I do not exceed truth when I add that I have personally known many hundreds of people, worthy of all respect and confidence as subjects of Christ's kingdom, although not members of any church, whose replies, I am sure, would have been of the same description. But I have thought it best to omit the seventeen extracts, and, in place of them, to present a summary of their contents; for, although they made the original lecture more vivacious, they were too diffuse to be printed. Some of my correspondents, too, have expressed a wish that I should print the substance rather than the words of their communications. .

tion to articles, refuse on the same ground to become members of Independent churches, and so to sustain the trust-deeds of these churches. And they refuse the more earnestly because, while they are persuaded that the faith of numerous members of these churches is not in accordance with their trust-deeds, they observe that the ministers, and in particular those who possess the most authority, though often declaiming in favour of the right of private judgment, are wont to dogmatize as positively as any people in support of their own interpretation of the sacred text, and their own apprehension of the mind of the Holy Ghost. They object, therefore, to the character of the deeds, to the bigotry and dogmatism of their chief supporters, and to the ignoble position of their inferior supporters.

There are those, too, who think that the importance of church-membership is so unduly magnified by the Independent churches in general, as in effect to misrepresent the kingdom of Christ, and thus to render it obligatory upon many who would otherwise join an Independent church, to remain aloof, and so to exhibit a practical protest against the exaggerations. For such objectors cannot concur in those representations from the pulpit and elsewhere, according to

which membership in a church, and, in particular, participation of the Lord's Supper, is the chief, if not the exclusive mode, for the confessing of Christ before men. They shrink, too, from all such statements as degrade the communion of saints into communion with a particular church or association of churches. Many of them, also, are not so satisfied concerning the exclusively divine authority of Independent churches, and particularly of Independent churches as they are, as to be willing that either themselves or their families should join one of them subject to private obloquy, if not to public censure, should they subsequently adhere to a church differently constituted; for they believe, with especial respect to their children, that people should be able to join a church for the sake of present spiritual advantages, without undertaking in such a way to support the Independent polity through life, that withdrawal from it shall be regarded as moral inconsistency or desertion of principles.

It must be added, moreover, that among this numerous class of objectors the feeling is very prevalent and very strong, that not only spiritual but financial considerations, although not avowed, have much to do with both the exaggeration of

the importance of church-membership, of which I have spoken, and the vindictive spirit that so frequently pursues individuals who withdraw from Independency. And as the institutions of Independent churches are maintained by voluntary contributions, and the members are the only parties to whom specific appeals can be made for their maintenance, or who can be regarded as undertaking to maintain them, it is manifest that there is much danger, especially in a country in which church-systems are in mutual antagonism, lest not only pecuniary but political considerations, which no man would acknowledge, should, nevertheless, prompt both ministers and others to make use of exaggerated statements of the spiritual advantages of membership, in order to urge people, and, in particular, young people, to "join the church."

In the third place, it is felt by very many that while the Independents profess to uphold scriptural holiness, they practically substitute for this, to a great extent, a conventional holiness that has no authority except opinions of their own, nurtured in ignorance of facts, and fears received by tradition from their forerunners. The privileges of church-members, it is said by these objectors, are especially urged upon people who are

not members, and the duties of the relation upon such as are; neither the privileges nor the duties, however, being, in all instances, such as appertain to members exclusively, and both being, in some cases, fanciful and arbitrary rather than scriptural and self-commandatory. Thus, while unduly exciting appeals are directed, and, in particular, to the young, for the effecting of their membership, the end when gained is employed for no worthy ulterior purpose, and it is well if the general spiritual health is not impaired. According to the Scriptures, there are but few duties that are urged upon church-members as such, and but few privileges that are theirs exclusively. Union to Christ, or union to the one spiritual church of Christ, but not union to any small organization called a church, is the state to which the chief privileges of the gospel belong; and it is on men as moral agents and as believers, but not as church-members, that almost every duty is enforced. Representations of this nature conduce, now, to the righteousness and true holiness wherein consists likeness to God; whereas statements that give prominence to church-membership as the scriptural sphere of Christian duty, tend to the formation of an artificial, a modal, a merely ostensible holiness, that is neither a

necessary expression of the free operations of moral principle, nor a course of obedience to any precise and positive precepts.

Hence it is felt that members of Independent churches, if, without respect to other men's opinions, they act in some matters, or decline to act in others, according to their independent individual convictions of duty and liberty, are exposed either to obtrusive interference with their conduct, although it violates neither morality nor specific scriptural injunction, or to the odious but intangible charge of defective spirituality; or that if they do not concur in the ways adopted in any particular church for the exhibition of Christian liberality or zeal, or for the expression of general philanthropy, they are disesteemed as lukewarm, or crotchety, or unbrotherly, or not ready to encourage the pastor. In short, the personal liberty is cramped by a variety of pleas and considerations, such as tend to enfeeble and vitiate the character, unfit people for general society, and eventually accustom them to regard their narrow range of thought and action as the centre of the spiritual universe, if not as the whole spiritual universe itself.

It belongs, too, to the same class of objections, that the idea of church-member holiness, as dis-

tinct from that of Christian holiness, gives support to a belief in the possible maintenance of the activity of the affections towards the specific matters of the Christian revelation, such as appears to many people to be incompatible with the conditions of human existence upon earth, at least in a complicated state of society. Moreover, the intolerance of which complaint has been made in respect of personal conduct, is felt to be extended towards opinions or doubts, even when these have not been regarded as, according to the trust-deeds, preventive of membership; the assumption of the superior holiness of the holders of certain tenets, or of the adopters of a certain course of conduct, such tenets and such conduct as are only traditionally proper, giving rise not to a respectful forbearance towards those who demur to it, but merely to a disrespectful toleration of them, such a toleration as has the effect of overbearing intolerance.

In the fourth place, it is an important stumbling-block to many, that various matters are often referred to the decision, or proposed for the adoption, of Independent churches, with which churches as such have nothing whatever to do; the wish of a majority, or even of a small section of the members of a church, thus at times

acquiring the force of a church-decision, and involving the other members in its effects, just as absolutely as if it were an explicit direction in the New Testament; and this, perhaps, when the dissentient members, not expecting such a movement, had not even had an opportunity of preventing it. Similarly, also, it is felt by such people, that however willing they might be to join a church that was really Independent, so that they could exert in it an influence correspondent to their responsibility, they are not prepared to join a church that by means of delegates may commit the whole society, and, therefore, to some extent, the personal character of all its members, to proceedings in one part of the kingdom or in another, in which, haply, neither justice nor sense shall have any place.

In the fifth place, a protest is made by a very large class of people against the examinations to which they would be subjected in order that an Independent church might be satisfied of their fitness to enter it; while no few object that, should they enter it, they could not subsequently resign their membership without either submitting the causes of their secession to the opinion of the church, or exposing themselves to immediate censure. And, in the last place, the

abuse of excommunication is the occasion of no little offence ; this most forcible form of a church's censure being frequently, perhaps generally, held in perspective for the prevention of insubmissiveness to the pastor's authority, or the church's, rather than occasionally produced for the correction of immorality or of avowed disregard to the authority of Christ.

It should be observed, now, that a large part of those whose objections I have thus brought forward, occupy a position towards Independent churches like that which these occupy towards the Church of England. Just, therefore, as we are apt to say that the Church of England forces from her communion the more conscientious, the more thoughtful, and the better instructed in the Scriptures, we are bound, I think, to assume that our "congregations" are to a great extent distinguished from "our churches" in the same honourable respects. It is easy to accuse the dissentients of worldliness, of fear of church-discipline, or of general indecision in regard to God's spiritual service; but the chief results of such crimination are diverse injuries to our own spiritual health, and the more thorough alienation from us of those whom we thus castigate.

Candour and modesty would at all events

dispose us to inquire whether such adherents to our churches do not, perhaps, exhibit more attachment to Independency than the larger part of the members of our churches ; and if not more attachment to the truths commonly received among us, yet so much attachment as to warrant the presumption that no small amount of spiritual faith exists among them. Of this, certainly, I am well persuaded, that few church-members would retain their membership, if exposed on its account to such invidious remarks as those to which many of them subject "the congregation" on account of their non-membership ; these non-communicants, meanwhile, through one cause or another, acquiring a general strength of character which esteems all such invidiousness as a matter of small moment, and contentedly pursues the path that it deems right.

And all this time it is a fact, that in a large number of instances it is the social respectability of "the congregation" that gives "the church" what reputation it possesses beyond the walls in which it holds its meetings ; that most of our churches in large towns are obliged to defer to some extent to the wishes of "the congregation," although not concurrent with their own desires, the pecuniary aid derived from the congregation

in support of the different institutions being too important to be overlooked ; that many rural churches are notoriously as inferior in general intelligence and moral powers as they are in wealth to the congregations connected with them, and that their dependence on the congregations corresponds ; and that hence there frequently arise jealousies, factions, or machinations and secret cabals, in the two bodies, by which a pastor's life is grievously disturbed, even if his official relation is not affected.

For seeing more than the church usually has opportunity to see of the real worth of the congregation, he can hardly fail to be influenced by this to an extent beyond what the church are prepared to approve ; while it being his misfortune to feel pre-eminently the evils of ill administered Independency, and yet to be expected to defend them, it is well nigh impossible for him to awaken a more respectful sentiment towards himself in the superior part of the congregation, than the sentiment of pity.

On the topic now in hand it would be easy for me to enlarge ; for materials abound, and I have carefully refrained from efforts to bring my facts into a strongly advantageous light. Especially I have withheld myself from enlarging

on their more spiritual aspects. Yet I have deep convictions respecting the effects of our church-system upon thousands who in earlier life would gladly have become communicants but for such objections as those which I have specified, and who would then in all probability have been preserved from habits which it is allowed, disqualify them at present for church-fellowship, and are little likely to be discarded. I feel strongly, too, that the paucity of our communicants in comparison with our hearers is altogether incongruous with the predicted, and, I believe, the real character of this spiritual dispensation; a dispensation that was to be remarkable for the outpouring of the Holy Ghost. And I know no reflections more humiliating and distressing than those made when we are constrained, as I confess myself to be constrained, to trace no small part of the self-conceit, the spiritual assumption, and the impracticable wrong-headedness, so often characteristic of members of our churches, to the isolation and the definiteness of outline which the churches have attained, and in which they seem to glory. But I do not feel myself required by my subject to prolong this class of considerations, although they are of the very first importance, and although in their

absence it is impossible to do full justice to the facts that I have alleged.

Granting, however, that to some of my auditors these facts may appear exaggerated in my treatment of them, (though we should bear in mind that unless a man has examined widely, and thought long, he is scarcely qualified to pronounce positively concerning such statements; yet granting that what I have said may appear somewhat disproportionately strong,) I have no doubt that my hearers in general, supposing them to have spent many years among Independents, have been reminded of so much in confirmation of what I have advanced, as to be prepared to concur in the conclusion, that a better, a just administration of Independency would to an important extent have prevented the state of things actually existent between our churches and our congregations.*

In raising an Independent church to maturity,

* What, then, have been the effects of an unwise administration of Independency, first, in the quiet secession of numbers from our ranks; and secondly, in the prevention of the adhesion to us of greater numbers? And now that we are becoming the objects of closer scrutiny to clergymen, to statesmen, and to private laymen who may be reckoned by tens of thousands, what must the future consequences be if we still persist in an unnatural exhibition of our real principles?

we see, then, that we raise that anomalous body also which we call “the congregation;” and after making every allowance we feel that much, if not all, of what imparts to this congregation a fixed aspect, and a force approximating that of an organized body, is attributable to faults in the administration of our principles. Let us now look, then, more particularly at some of the matters thus suggested ; and, first of all, at the operations of our trust-deed system.

And in adverting to this system it is necessary to have respect to the difference between a people's civil right to appropriate buildings and other property for what purposes they please, and a church's duty in consenting to a scheme by which the particular opinions that a church ought to hold, and the observances that they ought to maintain, are determined on human authority for ever ; a scheme, indeed, by which grave reproach is implicitly cast on as many churches and Christian people as walk in any wise according to other rules. The advocates for such trust-deeds as are common among us, easily evade the real question by referring to formulas like these ; that men are under obligation to uphold and to diffuse what they believe to be the truth ; that they are correspondently

forbidden to propagate, or to give facilities for the propagating of what they believe to be error ; and that but for their trust-deeds they could have no security for the right use of their property after their death. But even if all these positions were quite unexceptionable, though they are not, yet even if they were, they do not affect the question in discussion. For this question is nothing less than, "What is the truth which *churches should be organized to maintain?*" Our trust-deeds, now, assume that churches are institutions for the maintenance of the particular tenets that the deeds exhibit as unquestionable ; and I assert in opposition that this assumption is neither scriptural nor congruous with Independency. I believe, too, that it alone would be found sufficient to ensure the ultimate condemnation of Independency by the people of this country, if Independency upon close investigation should be identified with it.

As the creed, or whatever it be, to which the church that enjoys the property shall be bound, is merely a work of men, and as no scriptural authority has ever been adduced by Independents in favour of the binding of a church to a human form of words, or of a church's undertak-

ing to vindicate that form of words as equivalent to the gospel, I need say nothing further on the unscripturalness of our ordinary deeds; and I think I can show that our system of deeds has no more sanction from Independency than it has from the Bible.

For by an Independent church is not denoted a church that has no respect to the will of Christ, but a church free from all other control in order that it may serve Christ only. Independents are pure scripturalists, and believe in neither omission nor addition. It is their peculiar profession, not that they can defend their system by Scripture, but that their system embodies the one mind of God concerning church-polity that is ascertainable from the Scriptures. But as they acknowledge that the divine authority has forbidden rather than enjoined the imposition, or anything equivalent to the imposition, of human expressions of divine things, for them to give their countenance to such imposition is as incongruous with Independency as it is with Scripture. If they professed nothing more than to be a club or private association for the diffusion of their views of divine things, their case would be defensible; at least the only assailable point would be the expediency of such a

society in the absence of scriptural authority for its formation.

But the profession made by Independents is considerably in advance of this. They form churches, scriptural churches ; such churches, too, as think themselves pre-eminently entitled to expect the gracious presence and assistance of the Holy Ghost ; such, moreover, as are divinely authorized to urge it upon all believers to unite themselves with them. And for such churches to say, or to act as if they said, that any human formula, however brief, however comprehensive, is equivalent to God's utterances ; still more for them to divide and subdivide their version of the divine testimony into many articles, and while maintaining on the one hand that all Christians ought to join a church, yet to assert on the other that the church ought to believe and uphold the whole of these articles ; then, further, for them to take measures that this conduct of theirs shall be an established precedent for the guidance of future generations ; and, after all this, for them to deny that human authority ought to have any force in ecclesiastical concerns, and to maintain that every man ought to exercise his own free thought in all religious matters ; this, viewed altogether, constitutes to my mind one of the

most egregious and humiliating manifestations of human inconsistency with which I am acquainted. They first say that God forbids them to substitute either human authority or human words for his ; they then declare, acting, they say, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and through the grace of the Holy Ghost, that certain human words are fit expressions of spiritual things, and that if any man will not concur in this he must be debarred from church-communion ; they proceed, however, to urge it as a solemn duty upon all believers to enter into their communion ; and they, lastly, crown this marvellous structure with the most urgent entreaty, not to say declamatory direction, to every man to search the Scriptures for himself, with lowly confession of much ignorance and liability to error, and with systematic prayer that the Holy Ghost will illuminate him, and will guide him into all truth.

And Independents have not the excuse that it is not they, but the donors of the property, who require that the church using it shall believe according to the trust-deed. For the church, if not the chief donors, are usually among the donors ; they aid in the like investment of other property ; and by consenting to use property thus invested they commit themselves to the principle.

It may be true, and I doubt not that it is, that but few church-members are aware of the particular conditions on which they have the benefit of the property; while it is a very rare case that an applicant for membership is expected to express his concurrence in those conditions. Practically, too, the conditions are applied in a most generous spirit; and I believe that neither pastors nor members often apprehend any logomachical or litigious interference with their opinions, on the ground of the provisions in the trust-deed. Yet for all this the system is unquestionably very injurious. Many conscientious and reflecting Christian men are excluded by it from fellowship in the church. The greater part of the members are introduced in support of they know not what; and, perhaps, few of the members of long standing, who have exercised their minds vigorously on scriptural truth and in theological science, could adopt all the words of the trust-deed unless in a sense much modified from that which there is reason to believe they originally bore. If, now, there is not conscious falsehood in all this, there is not the strength of conscious consistency and of a well-proved basis. If there is not bondage, neither is there the consciousness of freedom.

Meanwhile it would be contrary to all the phenomena of human experience, if a pastor's ministrations were not frequently affected by the trust-deed. It seems, indeed, impossible that he shall not be somewhat influenced in his exegesis of the Scriptures by the fact that he is virtually pledged to the support of a creed, or that he shall be as free to avail himself of all aids to the formation of just opinions on metaphysical theology, as he would be were he not aware of the existence of a power that, if he deviate much from a prescribed mode, can subject him to extreme inconvenience, or even to the risk of worldly ruin. His position will appear the worse, too, when we remember that, as has been already shown, he has for the most part enjoyed his professional, if not his general education also, on the virtual condition of devoting his life to the maintenance of similar formulas ; so that long before he was qualified to penetrate into these formulas, and to examine them in various lights, he was pledged, and this amidst the most solemn sanctions and associations, to uphold them as the fittest expressions of the truth of God. In this condition he had prepared himself for the pastorate ; in this condition he fulfils it ; and yet is he the public and the strenuous advocate of

Independency, and, possibly, a disclaimer against subscription to the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England. Moreover, he preaches the duty of thorough and free thought, and prays for the fullest aid of the Holy Ghost for this purpose ; although he is all along tacitly assuming that such thought, and that such gracious aid, can only work within limits that are of men's contrivance.

And although I have conceded that not many cases occur in which trust-deeds among Independents furnish occasion for what, if I must not call it persecution, I regard as the exercise of an unchristian dominion over men's faith, I have nevertheless met with some such ; as well as with others in which, under the appearance of prudence, an offensive officiousness has bound down future beneficiaries of the property to observances, rigidly to persevere in which might become inconvenient, to say the least. I have known the classical tutor of a college to be dismissed on the formal ground that his views of the Lord's day were not in accordance with the Assembly's Catechism, the standard of truth upheld in the college deeds ; his censors being men of whom I apprehend that not one received all the dicta of the catechism in their original mean-

ing. I have known students in like manner to be expelled from college, ostensibly because unable to assent heartily and in all respects to formulas to which, perhaps, in all their particulars, none of their judges would in mature life have expressed an unqualified adherence. And I have known several pastors threatened by the members of their churches, and by others, with the interference of the trustees of the property that they occupied, on account of only such phraseology as was then common among the Independents, though it was not in unison with the provision of the trust-deeds. But I refrain from speaking of such cases as cases of persecution, the sufferers having used the property subject to the possibility of such dogmatic treatment. Assuredly, however, those who troubled them took advantage of an opportunity to exercise a lordship over faith for which the Scriptures give no warrant. If individual men choose to say, that they will not allow property for which they are responsible to be enjoyed by those who cannot adopt certain forms, we leave them to their undoubted prerogative of free action, whatever we may think of their wisdom and their aspect of infallibility. But when this position is taken not merely by individuals, but

virtually by churches, the individuals seldom having either place or power for action but as they are really, if not nominally, representatives of churches, we then deny that their conduct harmonizes with either Independency or the Scriptures. For it opposes both the catholic spirit of a New Testament church, and the distinctive professions of Independency.

And even of such provisions in trust-deeds as may seem rather officious and vexatious than serious preventives of liberty of thought, I have some reason to think that there are numerous instances in existence, although not generally known. Either it is so, or I have been particularly unfortunate in meeting with such instances. But as examples of what I have ascertained, I can speak of a deed, prepared under the direction of one of the most celebrated living preachers for church-property in a town near him, according to which no election of a pastor can be legally valid unless conducted agreeably to such minute specifications as it is hardly possible to observe. I know another, by which the enjoyment of certain property depends on the singing of a doxology at the close of every Sunday's services. I know a third, by which the church are forbidden to use an organ, or, I think, any instrumental

music, as long as one member of the church objects to it. I myself, having been the pastor of a church for twelve years, had left it for five, before learning that according to the deed the pastor was under obligation to read it annually at a church-meeting ; and it was some time after becoming the pastor of another church ere I learnt that, according to the deeds by which it enjoyed its property, it was forbidden to allow "Baptists" to join it, and was bound to take the Lord's Supper weekly.

Reverting, however, to the graver aspects of the matter, I believe that the full evil of the system will appear only, perhaps, when we remember that it is adopted by other sects than the Independents. For if we Independents say of these sects, that but for their trust-deeds, and other such contrivances, many of them would change their opinions and approximate us ; and if, listening to their public prayers for Divine enlightenment, we interpret them to mean, Divine enlightenment for the discovery of what shall endear their theological or their ecclesiastical peculiarities to themselves and to their adherents ; can we be so destitute of modesty as to fail to apply the like considerations to ourselves ? And can we hesitate to conclude, that if all such

trust-deeds, and the like, were destroyed, a chief support of sectarianism and denominationalism would be removed, and a most important obstructive of the great work of the Holy Ghost?

Meanwhile it behoves us to open our eye to the fact, that so long as our trust-deeds are what they are, observers in general will identify Independency with Calvinism; will suppose that, in the esteem of Independents, Calvinists only ought to be church-members; and will farther believe that a verbal union concerning all the great mysteries revealed through the Scriptures for our contemplation, is essential, in the judgment of Independents, to any ecclesiastical fellowship whatever. And against these conclusions I believe that it would be in vain for us to protest, referring to the principles of Independency. "Your principles would appear good," it would be answered, "but for your strangely inconsistent practice. This, however, is so uniform that it appears to be the necessary fruit of your principles. Independency must be understood from its trust-deeds; and we decide, therefore, to reject your system. For whatever may at first appear to be constitutional, if it be plainly overridden by the statute-book it must be interpreted accordingly. You administer Independ-

dency through the medium of your trust-deeds ; and though a just administration may reconcile men to a vicious constitution, a bad administration can but excite their distrust of the best constitution that exists merely upon paper."

Let me now direct your attention to our pew-rent system ; a system not, indeed, peculiar to us, any more than the first two points that I have considered are exclusively ours ; but nevertheless so generally adopted by us that, if it be found faulty, and Independency persevere in the retention of it, our polity must bear the odium of inability to sustain itself without participation in an evil. And it should at once be observed, that those leaders in the Church of England whose qualifications and responsibilities direct them especially to watch the probable effect of circumstances on the distant future, while their position is a guarantee of their disinterestedness, augur ill for the popularity of their church-system should the plan of pew-rents be much more extensively adopted among them than it now is. Some of them even propose to contract its present range, or, if possible, to extinguish it altogether. We, of course, may thoroughly disapprove the substitute which the Church of England would prefer, while at the same time

we may sympathize with it in the dislike of pew-rents.

For although Independency does not repudiate the principle of endowments, we shall all, I suppose, readily allow that it stands in no natural relation to them, that it appears to feel no need of them, and that the principle is congenial to it, of providing for each day's wants as they arise. We will not say that a pastor supported by endowments must necessarily become overbearing, and regardless of his people's spiritual wants: for the Church of England could at once confute us by referring to a crowd of its clergy, both the dead and the living. Yet certainly there is a stronger probability of a pastor's abuse of endowments, especially if, as among Independents, he were subject to no ecclesiastical superior, than there is of his becoming unfaithful and servile when dependent on his people's donations. For as the great ends of his ministry depend on the Divine blessing, and this blessing cannot be expected on unfaithfulness and servility, any temptation that a pastor without endowments may feel to ensure his temporal advantage by means of these vices, can but ultimately, unless in exceptional instances, mislead him into general disesteem and poverty: whereas the temptations felt by the

enriched pastor to indifference and contempt towards his people, are neutralized by no check whatever except that of spiritual principle.

Lord John Russell should have been more just, whatever he might have seen of Independent pastors' occasional succumbing in their poverty to the influence of wealth, than to say in his place in the House of Commons, and as a minister of the Crown,

"The pulpit's laws the pulpit's patrons give ;
And they who live to preach must preach to live."

For although the sarcasm may not have found us invulnerable, its inditer ought to have remembered the exposed and tender flank of his own system ; especially as he spoke where voluntaryism had then scarcely a champion, and still more especially as no statesman had ever been so much thwarted as himself by what he knew to be the unprincipled opposition of overbearing church-leaders, who, secure in their endowments, risked nothing by their arrogance.

Our business, however, is not with an evil substitute for a system supposed to be evil, but with this system itself ; and after closely watching its operation in various circumstances for more than five-and-twenty years, I feel no hesitation in exhibiting pew-rents as an evil. There is one

respect, indeed, in which the evil resulting from them in Scotland is somewhat less than it is in South Britain. For in England there is a widely extended feeling, that if a man pays what is demanded for the room that he occupies in the church, he gives all, or nearly all, that is incumbent upon him for the maintenance of the institutions that he enjoys ; whereas in Scotland the understanding is more general, that the rents, although important, are but one of the ways and means of revenue. Hence, perhaps, there are few regular attendants at an Independent church or chapel in Scotland, who do not make a weekly donation at the door ; and the sum thus collected is generally considerable, and is sometimes in advance even of the pew-rents. I am not now recommending this system, but only stating as a fact, that our northern brethren, although far, I think, from perfection in their financial management, are yet less accustomed than the English to regard pew-rents as a full payment for their advantages.

Yet where the pew-rents are appropriated, as they so frequently are in England, for the pastor's support, it should be at once obvious that a large additional income is required for all that is comprehended in incidental expenses. If a

man would really give his equal share, he should not pay pew-rents only, but a proportion of the entire expenditure corresponding to the seats that he secures. Indeed, the difficulty of providing revenue for incidentals has caused many churches to raise the pew-rents slightly, deducting the addition thus made for general purposes. Yet notwithstanding this auxiliary assessment, and annual, quarterly, or even six-weekly collections (which I have known) for the general fund, there are few of our churches in which, but for the special and almost unknown donations of a few, the pecuniary embarrassment would not be very painful.

And there can be no wish that in this matter the wealthy should not contribute according to their wealth. Indeed the point that chiefly requires consideration is, that by means of pew-rents the poorer worshippers are either burdened beyond their means, or subjected to serious disadvantages ; while numbers of poor people feel themselves altogether excluded from our places of worship. No ecclesiastical regulations will ever be heartily adopted in any country, if the artisans, and the class of tradesmen who supply their wants, feel that those regulations themselves put distinctions between them and their

richer neighbours in what is called a house of prayer for all people without respect of persons. It is often not possible for a family of those whose cause I am pleading to pay for three, four, or five sittings, together with a fair share of what is required for incidental expenses; and I never yet met with a man who liked that his children should be separated from him, while he could see the children of richer people together with their parents. The church is the scene in which especially any wrong or inordinate feelings excited by distinctions resulting from the action of natural social laws, should be rectified and assuaged; it will never be popularly felt to be a house of God, if those feelings are rendered more intense by the adoption there of such measures as give peculiar prominence to the distinctions that sustain them. The cherishing of mutual good-will and mutual honour among all classes, and the awakening of the mingled feelings of personal manhood and responsibility, these are among the objects of church-association; but to me it seems impossible that they can ever be promoted in the most effectual manner among all classes of people, if pew-rents, and usages of the like tendency, are maintained.

But the great body of the attendants at public

worship will never be so poor as not to have it in their power to contribute something towards the outlay from which they derive advantage ; and it is even of the first importance to the interests of all who attend, that they should not be misled by the rent-system, or by any system, so as to bear less than the share which under a different system they would willingly bear, of the entire burden of the church's institutions. I have shown that, heavy as pew-rents are among us, a large part of our expenditure is defrayed by the richer worshippers. But I cannot doubt, till forced by facts, that if people knew to how large an extent they owed their advantages to the gift of a few rich fellow-worshippers, they would shrink from this indebtedness, and would demand, so long as they had ability, to pay the full cost of what they used.

I am assured, after inquiries so wide that I feel authorized to speak of them as sufficiently wide, that comparatively few in either our congregations or our churches are at all aware of the actual cost of our establishments. Of course it would be possible to bring all this before them, and to leave the matter very much to their consciences, even were pew-rents retained. But experience shows that this is not done ; and on

a little reflection we shall conclude, I think, that it is not likely to be done. For no man accustomed to the present system, and paying what is demanded for a seat, would listen without surprise to a subsequent demand for a sum that would in all cases be a large addition to the first, and that, if an annual rent were paid for the chapel-premises according to their value, would frequently be very much larger than his first payment. And if no man would expect such a demand, no other man, knowing his unpreparedness for it, would be likely to prefer it. And hence it is not preferred; and, I repeat, not many church-members even know much about either our expenditure or our channels of income. People, one of whose favourite topics is the undue influence of the few rich men who frequent our worship, ought, I apprehend, to be made aware of their dependence on these richer men for the advantages that they uncharitably abuse. At all events their declamation sounds ungracious, while, in order that their penny or their shilling may return to them with profit, those whom they envy, heedless of their unkindness, add to their payment another of equal value, and, perhaps, another, besides making provision for themselves and for the poor.

To many of my hearers it might seem incredible, were I to narrate all that I have seen in rural districts of the working of our pew-rent system in this respect. I will, however, state two facts as illustrations. There are churches and congregations famed for liberality, and for zeal for Independency, in which but a very small minority give throughout the year what is sufficient to pay for the cleaning of the seats that they occupy ; setting aside their share of other current expenses, and the consideration that, perhaps, they have given nothing, or but very little, towards the original procuring of the premises. And I have known congregations, the payment by any member of which for a single sitting, was allowed to entitle him, and members of his family, to a grave in the chapel-yard ; though this grave had cost much ; though the chief-rent upon it would alone, in the course of time, equal the aggregate of all his seat-hire ; though he paid but a shilling, or even less, *per quarter*, for his sitting ; and though the pride and the overbearing of the rich, who supplied what was lacking in his service, were his favourite topics.

The great remedy, now, for the evils thus suggested, (and I am not enumerating all the

actual bad effects, but only specifying such as may suggest the whole), the great remedy, I apprehend, is to give the most thorough publicity to our financial business, and then to trust altogether to the free action of men's principles.

But for our rent-system, those who undertake the management of our finances would feel constrained, having no endowment to depend on, to throw open all things to the view of their constituents, and to make a direct and personal application of all the considerations bearing on such matters. And I cannot doubt that the constituents in general would hereby be greatly benefited. At all events they would know the cost of their institutions. I believe, too, that they would find a pleasure, and would secure much spiritual advantage, as well as the authorized sense of personal independence, in doing what they could to meet the requirements. The deacon's office, by whatever name it might be called, would become a post of real business, and would thus attain its due importance. In many instances the pastor's income would be augmented. His salary, too, no longer consisting of pew-rents, a strong temptation would be prevented to build chapels so large as to defy a pastor to attend duly to his people's spiritual

wants. One cause would be removed which now acts powerfully for the organizing of what we call "the congregation." And in all cases, the serious obstacle now existing in prevention of the attendance of the poor, and of their elder children with them, would be taken away ; while instead of such a separation of the poorer from the richer in our places of meeting, as almost necessarily results from our ordinary system, there would be either such an intermingling as would be variously useful to all parties where the object is spiritual and moral culture, or such mutual concessions as, following general social laws, would injure and offend no one, while they would exemplify the compatibility of spiritual fellowship with the respect and the decencies due from one man to another. But the general subject of the financial system of the Independents is thus introduced ; and though it is not much that I wish to say upon it, I must yet beg the favour of your attention for a few minutes longer.

Yet if every one of my auditors should declare that he knew nothing at all concerning the matter, I should feel little surprise at his ignorance ; for I have seldom met with any one much wiser. Efforts have been made, I believe, to enlighten a few of the Independent churches on the general

subject ; but the practical benefit, I fear, has been very small ; indicating either that the efforts have not been thorough and wisely directed, or that Independency looks more powerful in the census-returns than it is proved to be in our treasurers' books. As to all such attempts as I have known made through the periodicals which are generally regarded as the popular organs of Independency, attempts naturally characterized by the shallow thought and the impudent dogmatism for which those organs are notorious, no one need wonder that they have proved effective of but little good, and have prejudiced the minds of numbers against the entire subject. Meanwhile all that is commonly known about this subject is, that the Voluntary principle provides all that is required, that pew-rents, public collections, and private subscriptions suffice, somehow or other, to balance disbursements year after year, that a few men give, there is no doubt, a great deal of money, and that Independency is certainly very expensive.

And why should it not be expensive ? In other words, why should we not spend much money on religious advantages ? On what means of spiritual and, therefore, of universal culture can we more wisely spend our

money, than on such as aim at the elucidation of the Scriptures, and the excitement of our social nature towards the things of our common salvation ? And if any man wishes that upon his personal culture not his own money should be spent but his neighbour's, such a man should hardly call himself an Independent, or pretend to a deep sense of the value of such culture. A man may not be able to contribute an equal share with others towards the expenditure from which he derives advantage ; and in the sight of Him who searcheth the hearts this man may yet contribute more than they who supply his deficiency. But even this man may be benefited by the knowledge of what his advantages cost some one ; and it is surely most undesirable that any man competent to give his equal share, should not give it if he wishes to give it and thinks that he does ; or that such a man, if not willing to give it, should yet be able to deport himself in the church as if he actually gave it ; or that any one should over-estimate the value of his contribution in relation to his returns. Yet I believe that the vast majority of the Independents are altogether ignorant of the matters thus denoted : and though some of our financial managers dread a full exposure of these things before

the public, lest people should be deterred from our assemblies because of the expense connected with them, others have a simple and an entire conviction that Independency will be sound and will flourish, only when every man shall know the cost of his advantages, and who defrays it.

My limits allow me to advert to but two or three particulars in further illustration. But it should not be forgotten by us, that most of our churches are so richly endowed as to diminish to a large extent the annual expenditure that would be otherwise required. For when a chapel is out of debt, as it is called, the people who use it are endowed with property which saves them from an annual charge equal to what they must have paid for their premises if hired. I can see no more shame in a church's paying rent for their place of meeting, than in any man's paying rent for the house that he inhabits. But I see cause enough for shame in what is the fact in innumerable instances, I mean in a person's feeling the same right in premises for which other people have paid, that he would feel in those towards which he had contributed. The phrase "that a church is in debt" for its premises, I regard, indeed, as having a very insufficient foundation in truth, and as singularly unfortunate.

For a people can be justly spoken of as in debt, only while they do not respond to current obligations, or while they use property left by their predecessors for religious purposes, without care that others may in like manner derive advantage from themselves.

Popularly, however, a church is said to owe nothing at the very time at which, in fact, it owes as much as it has derived from others' gifts, and is not endeavouring to requite. I am not pleading that a church ought to hire a building for its meetings, as a man hires a house for his habitation ; but only that so far as it is freed from obligation to pay rent for what it uses, it should bear this exemption in mind, and should feel a correspondent obligation to aid in providing for the wants of other people. There are unquestionable advantages in a church's having such a hold upon the premises desirable for their meetings, that no other party can, in ordinary circumstances, disturb them. But these advantages may be purchased at too high a price ; and they are, if through them the spirit of conscious independence is lost to a church, or if the delusion possesses its members that they have paid all that has been expended for their spiritual culture, when they actually receive it as a dona-

tive. If, in order that a man may have certain accommodations, some one or other must have paid capital, or some one else must now pay interest, it is but right that he should so see as to feel this; and the moral certainty is, that in the issue he will, if able, either pay for what he uses, or take care to give in other directions for similar purposes.

Allowing for special cases, perhaps the plan that would in general combine the largest amount of good with the smallest amount of evil, would be one by which the sum annually payable by a church for its premises should comprise a portion of the original outlay, according to the length of time through which the premises are likely to be serviceable, together with interest for the remainder, and a small provision for repairs. The money-charge for the religious assistance enjoyed by them as a church, be it much or be it small, would thus be known; to the effect, I apprehend, if properly put before them, of kindling rather than of damping liberality. However, it would be known, so that all self-deception would be prevented. A most salutary activity would also be excited in the financial managers. Then, too, incongruously excessive expenditure would be checked. That

great evil, moreover, would be prevented, which is not infrequently felt, when a man who has made large and even munificent donations for a chapel is conscientiously obliged to secede, or is unscripturally and despotically compelled to withdraw, from a church that has abused its vocation. And, lastly, many a pastor who, having a legal right to use the chapel-premises, while in honour and in religion he ought to leave them, would retire from them if not rent-free, rather than encounter the heavy pecuniary risk of providing for the annual charge upon them when deserted by his congregation. If, however, on any ground it be deemed desirable that the primary cost of the premises should be entirely defrayed, the fact that the succeeding worshippers are thus assisted in their spiritual culture by the liberality of their predecessors, should be continually employed as a plea for their own exercise of a correspondent generosity.

I would now speak of pastoral support, a matter about which I believe there is as much misapprehension as there is about our right to speak of a building as "*our* chapel." And I shall suppose that it is customary for the pew-rents to constitute the pastor's salary, and that the charge for a sitting is as high as three shil-

lings *per quarter*; though this is very much beyond the average price, unless only in our largest towns. If ever the charge is higher, and the congregation is numerous, the entire pew-rents are seldom given to the pastor; while, where it is lower, as it generally is, the following representations will apply with so much the more pungency. But if we suppose three shillings, or three shillings and threepence, the price for a sitting, this last, it is obvious, is threepence *per week* for each attendant. Many people, I allow, pay for more sittings than they occupy; but many also pay for fewer. We must deal, however, with the appointed charge; and for threepence, therefore, a man can consider himself entitled to the benefit of two services on every Sunday, besides that of any services that may be maintained in the week, in addition, perhaps, to various cares for his children, and to a share of his minister's gratuitous attendance at marriages, baptisms, funerals, and many less definite occasions. I have known instances, and there are many hundreds of such, of the payment by a man and his wife of ten shillings a-year for the two, (one shilling and threepence, or a little more than a penny *per week*, being the average price of the sittings in numbers of our chapels,) for the

support of ministers who conscientiously gave not less than two entire days to the preparation of each Sunday's sermons, and whose labours of other kinds were also as abundant as they could be. But adopting a much higher estimate than this, it should yet surely be kept in sight, that what we personally pay for the services that we receive, is scarcely ever such a sum as entitles any of us to prefer those claims upon a minister, and to make those complaints concerning him, for which Independents have made themselves notorious, which constitute one of the chief obstructions to a minister's happy usefulness, which prevent many people from becoming Independents, and which, I believe, deter no few of our best educated and wealthy young persons from thinking of the pastorate among us. And I do not doubt that if pew-rents were superseded, and the truth concerning these matters were once properly understood among a people, both their general bearing towards their pastor would be altogether more genial and confiding, and much larger contributions would be made for his support.

The mode in which such contributions should be made is a matter of comparative unconcern, and must, perhaps, depend much on local predilections. The great point that is desirable is,

that men who avail themselves of church privileges and accommodations, should know how much they contribute towards them severally, what is the lowest amount for which they can be sustained, and what is the highest that is desired. And were this service rendered by our deacons, so that each for whom they act should have full and certain knowledge upon all these points, it is not credible that many attendants at our churches would retain what they ought to contribute; while the result on the general temper of our people would in all probability be very beneficial, and in one respect pre-eminently.

For one of the most painful mutterings heard among us relates to the overbearing of our richer people, and to their absorption of the pastor's time. I can give the result of only my own observations upon this matter; but it is certainly of a different tenor from this prevalent complaint. On one aspect of the question I shall have another opportunity to speak before closing these lectures; yet I must here declare my conviction, that the complaint in reference to our pastors is in general either not just, or not preferred by just accusers. I have no doubt at all that pastors could almost universally trace such complaints as pain them concerning their lack of

service, or the character of their service, to a class of people who withhold from the common fund what it is in the power of their hand to give, and what, because they give it not, those who are called the rich contribute, thus paying, not for the poor, but for such as are wrongfully, and often fraudulently, withholding a real debt. And if rich men are ever overbearing, let but other men gain a right to stand up to them as equals, by giving for what they use according to their ability, and all arrogance on the part of the rich will soon disappear. But if our finances are so managed as to allow men to gain credit for justice and liberality, while, perhaps, they withhold more than is meet, it cannot be matter of astonishment should some of them be restrained by conscience from the expression of such opinions as they may have on any subject, or should those of them who have burst the bonds both of conscience and of modesty feel themselves rebuked by the bearing towards them of deacons, and of others to whom deacons must resort for money. Men who are required, as our deacons and their richer friends often are, and who know that they are required, to pay for those who would consider themselves dishonoured were anything but their religious privileges thus given to them by their

neighbours, are not likely, and are under no obligation, to regard such dependents on them with much complacence. Yet, after all, if a full and candid exposition of a church's financial affairs is never made to those whose contributions are desired, but the whole matter is involved in obscurity, till it appears to be an almost unmentionable secret, the first fault rests upon the managers themselves.

Omitting other matters of expenditure, I yet wish to direct your minds to the assistance given by churches to their poorer members. For my experience tells me that this assistance is practically much abused, and that both a more definite conception ought to be formed of what is a church's duty in this matter, and the knowledge be communicated to the church of what its deacons propose to do. Without adopting a socialistic theory, it is possible for our church-arrangements so to supersede, or so to overlay, those of political society, or those of mere private benevolence, as to introduce much undesirable confusion, and to be the occasion of most serious spiritual mischief.

There is no need to assert that in every instance a member who is in want shall be constrained to exhaust all other channels of supply before resorting to the church. But I believe

that to maintain the reverse, bringing him directly to the church-fund would be an infinitely greater evil. Nor can I doubt that unless a church is prepared to assert that a civic provision for the poor is incongenial with Christianity, its duty will frequently be to take care that such civic provision, when made, is enjoyed, and more especially that private benevolence is elicited, ere a grant corresponding to an implied claim shall be made from its funds. No Christian man will tolerate that his brethren shall suffer need. The question, however, is not, whether this shall be the case, but whether persons shall be entitled, by means of a church-connexion, to depend on this for support, rather than on more natural and less easily abused resources. Our deacons, I believe, might often increase the efficiency of their care, while diminishing the aggregate of their gifts; though, perhaps, were their care more enlightened and discriminative, they might find it in their duty to attend to many an instance of occasional suffering for which at present no man careth.*

* This is one of the topics to which it was impossible, within the limits assigned to me, to give as much attention as was desirable. I subjoin, however, a few additional remarks.—It appears to me, then, that in our care to maintain an approxi-

I would only add further on this topic, that even if a special church-fund for the poor be deemed desirable, and this might not always be the case, the custom of collecting for it at the close of every act of communion in the Lord's Supper has, I think, remote disadvantages, (though there is no need to particularize them,) and is exceedingly inconvenient where that

mative observance of one or two seeming scriptural precedents in respect of this matter, we have lost sight of many real permanent scriptural principles. There is evidence, we are told, that in primitive times "the church" supplied the wants of its poor members. We admit the allegation; but when it is stated, as a correlative duty, that every church ought, therefore, to supply the wants of its poor members, we are obliged to deny the justness of the inference. For it assumes two points which I believe to be without the slightest authority, and of which the assertion appears to me to be most unscriptural and pernicious. These are, first, that "the church" is equivalent to the aggregate of churches; and, secondly, that the Christian duty of supporting poor members is limited to the particular church to which any man belongs. I may add, too, that the great duty of humanity, to succour all such as are in need, is thus liable to be altogether overlooked.

It may be said in reply, that in this country the legal poor's-rate is devoted to the general poor, and the church-fund is sacred to the church's poor. But it is an unchristian and a most dangerous distinction that is thus drawn between poor and poor; as if those beyond our church were necessarily not Christian people; and as if those within it were excluded from the operation of both the general humanity and the Christian principle of

sacrament is observed weekly, and still more especially where there is a weekly collection for the general church-fund also.

But at this point it will be necessary to suspend our examination for the present: in the next lecture I hope to resume it, directing special inquiry to our various church organizations, and to our habits in the transaction of business.

all but their fellow-members. Is the will, the poor-law act, of the Imperial Parliament, the will, the act, of "the world," and not of "the church?" Does it deserve no respect from Christian men as soon as they become members of a Christian church? If it be cruelly or unwisely administered, whom does it behove so much as it behoves church-members to give care that it be properly administered? Why should we adopt the thought that it is more dishonourable for a poor man to receive aid from the nation than to receive aid from his church? To what a flood of various evils do we not give entrance when we adopt it; especially such evils as often corrupt the souls of our own poor members! I believe, and I have intimated it in the text, that church-fellowship gives occasion for pastor, deacons, and others, to become acquainted with many cases for which the poor-law was not designed, but which, nevertheless, deserve humane and Christian aid. To all such cases let our deacons manifest their church's kindness, and this with generous liberality: although no part of their duties will require more wisdom if they would avoid the doing of spiritual mischief; although, too, I doubt if they would often do well to keep a fund for their poor friends, instead of collecting privately for each case in turn as it arises.

LECTURE III.

INDEPENDENCY AS IT IS.

HAVING in the last lecture described such procedures as are common in the formation and the progress of an Independent church, I commenced an examination of certain points to which allusion had thus been made, and which struck me as requiring notice in relation to the chief principles or positions for which Independency is distinguished. Bearing in mind, then, the ordinary profession of Independents, that they hold Christian fellowship with all believers, that they are subject to no creed of human framing, that they plead for nothing but what is authorized in the New Testament, that they maintain the right of private judgment, that neither the pastor nor the Church has any warrant to impose what the Lord Jesus has not enjoined, that no church is subject to any external control, and that conscience must be obeyed at any hazard; bearing these things in mind, and also certain

features which I had assumed would be deemed requisite in any church-system fit for general adoption in this country, social comprehensiveness, namely, spiritual catholicity, power of self-perpetuation, and respectful independence of every other institution; I then brought into the light of these statements, first, the peculiar relations between the church and what is commonly called the congregation; secondly, the trust-deeds by which our churches enjoy property; thirdly, the custom of pew-rents; and fourthly, our financial system in general. I wish now to resume this examination, directing you to such other peculiarities of modern Independency as it seems to me important that we should place in the same light.

I have already alluded to the objections entertained by many to the process commonly adopted by us in our reception of applicants for church-fellowship. And as I believe that no single point is so effectually preventive of the increase of our church-members as this, it seems desirable to consider it more fully. It will introduce us, indeed, to a still wider subject, the sectarianism of the Independent churches, which, therefore, I propose to consider in connexion with it.

It is almost universally, and, I think, rightly

believed to be part of the theory of Independency, that the members already in fellowship should by their vote decide respecting the eligibility of applicants; and it is generally, though, perhaps, with a few exceptions, professed by Independents, that they receive into church-communion all who apply, and who give evidence that they believe on the Lord Jesus. But it deserves due observation, that the former of these points has the smallest possible amount of direct support, if any at all, from the New Testament. Such commands as, that we receive one another as Christ also received us to the glory of God, have a far more extensive reference than to fellowship in a particular church; although they are unquestionably applicable to this also. But beside such commands, and the scarcely pertinent statement, that when all the disciples in Jerusalem were afraid of Saul, and believed not that he was a disciple, Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles, and testified concerning him; beside this I know not anything in the Scriptures that affords a direct warrant for a church to consider whether or not they will take the Lord's Supper with a person desirous to take it with them, and will recognise him generally as a Christian. Much may be inferred from the

directions to churches to withdraw from, or to put away, parties unworthy to be identified with them. Also, I think it fairly assumed, in the absence of decisive proof to the contrary, that since churches, or societies of believers for the promotion of their common interests, were formed under apostolic sanction, they must have followed the laws taught by nature to all voluntary societies, and have virtually determined, therefore, who should join them, and who should not. I believe it must be allowed, too, that preponderating evidence precludes the supposition that apostles offered as promiscuous a welcome to the Lord's Supper as that which they gave to the preaching of the word. And although I find in the New Testament but few traces of advance towards a very definite organization of a church, yet I am bound to confess my belief that such organization was the necessary consequence of apostolic practice; that it was sure to be effected in the course of time in accordance with known apostolical principles; and that in the later writings there are much stronger evidences in its favour than what can be discovered in the earlier.

I adopt, therefore, all the principles of Independency on this matter, and, as on other matters,

dissent only from the mode in which they are administered. I would even direct those who plead for as open an admission to the Lord's Supper as is given to preaching, to the fact that, as the Scriptures, so all historical traditions oppose their position, and that the churches of Rome, England, and Scotland, to which they are wont to refer as exemplars of the practice that they desiderate among us, do neither theoretically nor practically maintain what is thus attributed to them. For, to confine our attention to the Church of England, not only does it require some knowledge and much profession in the candidate for confirmation, which rather imposing rite is obligatory for participation in the Lord's Supper, but a most important *veto* is vested in the parochial clergyman; while the churchwardens also, as representatives of the congregation, are empowered to report the cases of those whom they believe to be unfit, according to the canons, for communion in the Lord's Supper. If, now, a barrier to this communion shall be planted at all, I see no prospect of individual liberty, unless it be left where it seems to me that the Scriptures place it, and where Independency professes that it is, not at the discretion of the pastor, whether prompted or not by

representative officials, but in the hand of the entire church when meeting with all publicity to glorify Christ according to the gospel.

But, on the other hand, few things of the kind appear to me more outrageous than the erection of such practices as are common among Independents on the basis of the principles that I have now conceded. I can best explain my meaning by describing what generally takes place when any one desires to join an Independent church.*

Having expressed his wish to the pastor, such a person is questioned by him in respect both of his views of the chief matters that are revealed in the gospel, and of the course of thought and various feeling which has issued in his adoption of them. He states also the reasons for which he desires to join a church at all, and those for which he wishes to enter an Independent church in particular. If the pastor is now satisfied of the applicant's intelligence, self-knowledge, and sincerity, he proceeds to explain to

* In the lecture as delivered, I here gave accounts of what myself and friends of mine had encountered when we entered an Independent church; but the causes mentioned in the note on page 79, have moved me to substitute for those narratives the summary which now follows.

him that it is desirable to satisfy the church to the same effect, and that for this end it is expedient to adopt measures additional to the presentation to them by the pastor of a report of the substance of the conversation now held, and of such other information as he may possess concerning the applicant. He proposes, therefore, to nominate the applicant at the next meeting of the church ; to appoint two deacons, or other members who have the church's confidence, who, apart from the pastor, shall hold a conference with the applicant like that now held, and shall report the substance of it to the church ; and at the following meeting, usually after the interval of a month, during which period members of the church will have opportunity to make what independent inquiries they think fit respecting the candidate's eligibility, to submit the two reports to the brethren, together with a letter from the candidate himself, and then to take their votes respecting the application.

The letter of which I speak, is expected to contain the same class of matters that will be in the reports ; though it is likely to be concise or diffuse, and more or less formal, according to the writer's ability, wishes, and idea of what is desirable in the circumstances. But such a letter

is not required by every church ; the instances are few, however, in which no church-deputation converses with the applicant. Once, too, it was customary with some churches to require the presence of the applicant, in order that he might be openly questioned before them in respect of his religious principles and feelings. But I believe that this custom is now everywhere disused ; although still, in most cases I think, the applicant attends the meeting at which his wish for church-communion is considered, retiring while the reports and the letter are presented and the votes are taken, and returning when his application is received, in order that the pastor may publicly address him on his privileges and obligations. There are instances, too, in which first the pastor, and afterwards the members in general, or such of them as please, give him "the right hand of fellowship;" that is, publicly shake his hand as part of the initiatory ceremonial.

To me it is matter for wonder, that in our larger towns so many people are still persuaded to pass through the ordeal that I have described. In rural districts, in which the inhabitants are more likely to view with favour anything with the aspect of an exhibition or a scene, while the

sense of social propriety is necessarily less delicate, we may feel less surprise that objections to it are less rife and less tenaciously maintained. Yet even in such districts I have known many young women, and a few men, whose sensitiveness has been grievously offended by what they have undergone while joining one of our churches ; and I am assured that in cities and large towns the prospect of the ordeal repels large numbers of persons of all classes from our fellowship. Even of those who apply for admission to it there are few, I apprehend, who do not feel that the greater part of the process is unnecessary, and some of it most offensive. How often do candidates even inquire of the pastor if some part of the examinations, especially an examination by deacons or others, cannot be omitted ! And when shown that it is not easy to make exceptions, that the custom is of long standing, and that those who themselves have submitted to it would not like to supersede it ; or when informed by the pastor that he would not like to undergo the sole responsibility of endeavouring to ascertain the candidate's suitability, or that a church would soon suspect him of striving to crowd improper parties into it, either for the support of his credit or for the

formation of a faction ; or when urged by the considerations, that it is perilous to be ashamed to confess Christ, and that it becomes all His followers to bear His cross ; or when soothed by the assurance that it will soon be over, and that it is more painful in prospect, or in imagination, than in reality ; if after such appeals a candidate yields, yet how often do the examining deacons report that she could say very little, or even that she could not speak a single word to them ! How often is the excitement even pitiful ! How often do the more sensible and sympathetic of the examiners acknowledge that the duty imposed upon them, at no time pleasant, is occasionally most oppressive and irksome ; a sense of their incompetency so to conduct the conference in many cases as to elicit the candidate's views and feelings, or the manifest discomposure and confusion of the candidates themselves, altogether overpowering them !

Even to a minister, likely from education and from practice to be more skilful than another man in inducing free communications, as also to be more quick in apprehending what is denoted by broken utterances and other imperfect signs, yet even to a minister many people are likely to speak with constraint and reserve, when aware

that he will report to a public body as much as he thinks fit of what has hitherto been sacred from every being but God ! To a minister himself, few people, if any, would feel difficulty in communicating all that could be necessary for his satisfaction respecting their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and their submission to the divine authority as expressed through Him, if they were assured that he would report the result only on his own mind to the church, and not the particulars of the communication. But they are unspeakably shocked at the prospect of laying bare the workings of their minds and hearts to a promiscuous audience, and especially of doing this in conversation with deacons, or others, with whom, perhaps, they can feel none but the most general sympathy, who may be men altogether unfitted by social breeding and mental education to converse with them at all on any but the most ordinary matters, or of whose rigid formalism, or of whose theological preciseness and bigotry, or of whose habits of minute and solemn scrutiny in such cases, rumour, perhaps exaggerating the truth, may have spread many strange reports.

Many ministers, it is true, still plead for the continuance of this usage ; though I think that to a considerable number it appears both dis-

honourable to the pastor and a serious disadvantage to the church. I shall quote a few out of many communications furnished to me. One minister says, "I had once reason to expect that a Peeress would desire to join my church, while I had not a single member who was adequate to converse with her in the usual mode. It was not their comparative poverty that would have been felt to disqualify them, but their total inability to converse with a lady of such different habits from their own, on almost any matter except the affairs of their trades, and especially on such a matter as her conversion and spiritual experience. What could I have done in these circumstances had I not, when I became pastor of the church, persuaded them to leave all communication with applicants in my hands, unless in special cases?" Another minister once told me that his father having been a deacon of an Independent church, he had in early life seen so much practical evil resulting from the deputation-system, as to resolve never to become a pastor unless the church inviting him consented to supersede it. Another says, "I bore it till I could bear it no longer: so at last I told the church that I should discontinue it, leaving it to them, if they chose,

to express their disapprobation. They, however, acquiesced in my desire." It would be easy to multiply instances expressive of the like uneasiness under the action of the present system ; the sufferers, however, not having been able, like the friends above mentioned, to supersede it. But I have given sufficient space to the topic.

Yet it is proper to observe that the custom of requiring a written communication from applicants for fellowship is but little less objectionable, and is, perhaps, more susceptible of abuse, than that of deputing members to converse with them. I have had occasion to talk with some hundreds of applicants, and have always found myself obliged to assume an apologetic tone when explaining these usages : while the notorious fact, that in the preparation of the letter to the church recourse is usually had among the less educated classes, if not also among the more educated, to parties already in the church, for assistance of some kind or other in the preparation of the species of document that is expected, is alone sufficient to condemn the whole proceeding. On one occasion, when reasoning with a church upon this matter, and appealing to them whether they had not, almost every one of them, obtained such assistance, the consciousness that

responded to my appeal was a most important auxiliary in the effecting of my wish. Had it not been, I should have produced almost fifty of their letters that I had by me, containing such internal evidence as would have convinced any jury that all had been cast in one mould, or at the most two moulds, if not indited by one spirit.

And, after all, what do we expect by this close and troublesome scrutiny ? Is it purity of communion ? This is impaired by it ; inasmuch as our forms do not deter many who subsequently show their unfitness for the fellowship, while they do deter numbers whose purity would have heightened the general average. Is it the diminution of a pastor's responsibility ? We then gain a tremendous loss ; though that we do gain it I have little doubt. I may state in illustration, that not very long ago I heard one of those three or four ministers who, more than any others, would be regarded as authorities on all matters of Independency, a man, too, of much renown in some circles for his conscientiousness, justify his superficial treatment of applicants for fellowship by saying, that since the brethren made so searching inquiries there was little need for him to make any. Such virtual abdication

of one of a pastor's most important functions, I believe, however, to be not uncommon. Meanwhile do we thus prevent our pastors from introducing into the church people who would be rather personal adherents than faithful Christians? Yet it can surely be for no Independent pastor's interests, that he should be ecclesiastically connected with men of corrupt minds and unsubdued passions; his peace, his reputation, his very livelihood, being thus to a great extent at the mercy of their pride or their caprice.

I apprehend that in this matter we proceed on an altogether delusive supposition; the supposition that we can, by formal conversations with candidates, and listening to letters from them, attain a desirable kind and amount of satisfaction respecting their personal faith in the Lord Jesus, in addition to what we can otherwise obtain. I do not deny that pastors have frequent occasion to discountenance applicants: but I doubt if the occasion often arises to view during formal conversation with them; and I have no doubt that for one improper applicant whom a church-deputation refuses to sanction, twenty applicants might be found whom both the pastor and the deputation have heartily sanctioned to their own subsequent sorrow and trouble. It

seems to me that, in general, an application for church-fellowship brings with it its own credentials; to the effect, that is, of throwing upon those to whom it is presented the task of establishing its unfitness, rather than of imposing upon him who makes it the task of establishing its fitness.

A Christian church is no secret club, or society of unknown principles and objects. If it take care that its basis, its aims, and its procedures, are all displayed with the utmost possible publicity, *sub diu*, as they ought to be if designed to promote the glory of Christ, it is almost morally impossible that many unfit persons shall essay to enter it. Publicity of action on our part is the best conservative of our purity, rather than any examination that we can conduct into the views and the character of applicants for fellowship. Believing and maintaining that the church, and not the pastor exclusively, is the party who receives into communion, I yet doubt if a church can produce scriptural authority for more than the virtual pronunciation of a *veto* in cases of proved unfitness.

It must again be remembered, that an Independent church professes itself to be incorporated for the fulfilment not of its own mind, but of

the mind of Christ, whose will it is that no believer shall be excluded from fellowship with his brethren. It is a grave responsibility, therefore, that any church usurps, when it adopts such measures as act in prevention of believers' union to it. For a church to say of one man, "We think him a believer," and of another "We think him not a believer," when the two, men alike declare themselves to be believers, this may occasionally be a duty, but it is a duty for none but very peculiar circumstances. And when a person makes application to a pastor for fellowship with a church whose principles and proceedings are matters of public cognisance, and in the course of conversation evinces such intelligence, if he has not evinced it previously, as shows that he knows what he is doing, while he has such a moral character as cannot be impugned, I know not what more satisfactory evidence we can have of our duty to receive that person; and this especially when, as must generally be the case, the applicant is one with whose manner of life many of us are already well acquainted; and still more especially when the applicants are young people whom many of us have known from infancy, and whose parents, while approving their conduct, are themselves

church-members. Accounts of their personal history, and of their deportment when visited by the deacons, or other messengers from the church, may gratify an unworthy spirit of intermeddling with other men's matters, and may tend to the production of a low level of festering socialism among us; but that it will keep the church pure, or that it will do any good whatever, I do not believe, but totally deny.

In a complicated social state such as is civic life in Britain, there can be no objection for a longer or a shorter notice, according to circumstances, to be given to a church, of a person's wish to join it; so that in the interval any objection, if felt by individuals, may be communicated to the pastor, who is responsible for his treatment of it.* But surely it is high time that

* Yet if a pastor feels his due responsibility as the overseer, or bishop, of the church, it will be but seldom that he can introduce the name of an applicant whose eligibility he shall not have ascertained past question, and any possible objections to whom he shall not have detected and removed. In the case, too, of such young people as are described in the text, no period of probation could be requisite at all, unless for the sake of acting without partiality, and cutting off occasion from such as desire occasion. It might be difficult, too, to draw a real line of separation so as strictly to treat each case according to its peculiarities.

ceremonies, seldom performed in a very dignified manner at the best, and yet having an aspect that reminds me of the taking of the veil, or of initiation into heathen mysteries, rather than of the primitive way of mingling with such as, by taking bread and wine together publicly, thus showed the death of Christ for men without respect of persons, it is high time, I say, that ceremonies so repulsive and so misleading should be altogether disused. We are not, as soon as we enter a church, constituted judges of others' faith and discerners of their hearts; but are merely maintainers in common of principles and practices easily discoverable, so that such as declare themselves to be of the same way may join themselves unto us, if we know no cause that should forbid them, and may thus strengthen our testimony.

I may remark by the way, that the weekly observance of the Lord's Supper, rather than the monthly, has a tendency, I think, to dispel our superstitious feelings respecting it, while in no wise to prevent due seriousness. Primitive usage is unquestionably in favour of the position, that the Lord's Supper should be taken whenever Christians ordinarily meet for divine worship. Our ordinary meetings are weekly, on

the first day of the week; and whether one service or more than one is performed in the course of the day, there is virtually but one meeting, it may be with intervals. Still it would not consist with my convictions to plead for conformity to primitive usage, if the principle that led to that usage, the importance of showing the Lord's death, did not appear to me to be quite as obligatory and as expedient now as it was when it was first honoured. But I renew the expression of my conviction, that the frequent, the weekly observance of the Lord's Supper would tend somewhat to dispel those superstitious, or it may be morbid, feelings concerning participation in it, to which I trace much of the unnecessary form that passes for solemnity among Independents in regard to admission to it.

Yet we should gain but little by the disuse of the customs that I have reprobated, unless we also ceased to require a confession of Calvinism in a confession of faith, a profession of communion in Independency as essential to the communion of saints in a church, and conformity to traditional fitnesses as our evidence of scriptural holiness. Our general declarations as Independents are as catholic as can be desired; namely,

that we receive all whom Christ receives; in particular, that views of church-government are secondary to views of those spiritual things which would have concerned us equally as they now concern us, had our Lord spoken nothing respecting churches; and that, the kingdom of God being righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost, he that in these things serveth Christ, being acceptable to God, ought to be approved by men. These, the ordinary declarations of Independents, are, I say, scriptural and sound enough, and cannot, I suppose, be gainsayed. Our general practice, however, does more honour to our trust-deeds, although, perhaps, we design it not, than to these declarations.

For I apprehend that few people join our churches without an avowal of faith in both the theological positions that pass as Calvinism, and the ecclesiastical peculiarities of Independency; while it is believed that they refrain from various amusements, and adopt some few usages, the banning of the one of which, and the approval of the other, are mere matters of tacit conventional agreement.* Avowed ignorance of systematic

* "By pharisaism in religion we mean, not attachment to forms, but an incapacity of seeing or believing in goodness separate from some particular form, either of words or ritual. The

theology, or even a scruple to employ scholastic phrases as exponents of truth, notwithstanding apparently sincere desire to be taught of God, and the total absence of a polemical spirit; hesitancy with regard to the universally and inflexibly authoritative claims of Independency, especially of modern Independency, notwithstanding manifest desire to enjoy church-communion with the staunchest Independents, and to enjoy it for none but Christian ends; resort to modes of recreation which some men deem injurious to piety, though other and quite as competent witnesses have not found them thus injurious, and though no recreation can be discovered, even as no mode of religious service can be discovered, wherein piety may not be injured; or, lastly, determination not to adopt certain modes for the expression of or the culture of piety, which modes, however well adapted to other circumstances, seem inappropriate to present circumstances, and, if not recommended by tradition, would be hardly suggested by any one as at present desirable; any one of these four peculiarities would, I fear,

incipient stage of pharisaism is that in which men are blind to excellence which does not belong to their own faction; the final and completed state is that in which goodness seems actually evil."—Robertson's *Lectures on Poetry*, p. 50.

either prevent a man's reception into most Independent churches, or cause him to be so regarded as to render his union with it very painful.

And yet, were I willing to adduce instances which could hardly be adduced without an appearance either of burlesque or of sarcasm, and I wish in these lectures to refrain from both, I could exhibit such instances of a very widespread practical inconsistency, on the part of actual and honoured members, with what is thus required in applicants for membership, as would expose the administration of our church-system to much indignation and contempt. For we have not carried out, and we cannot carry out, the tests and the requirements that we nevertheless continue to employ in the case of applicants for admission to our churches. The inquisition and the judicial processes that would be requisite, were we resolutely to attempt the task, would soon evoke a storm of public censure that would overwhelm us. Meanwhile the application that is made to candidates of our tests of fitness for church-membership, not only deters numbers of enlightened, conscientious, and strongly intellectual persons from our ranks, but imparts, I say not to all who are in our churches, but to a large extent to our churches

in general, and especially to those members who the most strenuously endeavour to administer the system as it was at first administered to them, and who generally become our most prominent members, an aspect of sectarianism and of tyranny altogether inimical to the spirit of Christianity and to the rights of individual believers. Indeed, I have a deep conviction, for which I shall now show cause, that some of the operations of Independency are to a lamentable degree so despotical and so exclusive as to deserve the epithet, antichristian.

For I think it will be acknowledged that one end of a Christian church is the mutual support and protection of its members in their enjoyment of the liberty that there is in Christ; and that another is the disposing and the animating of them to maintain spiritual fellowship with all in every place who call upon the name of the Lord Jesus. I often see, now, both that men lose personal liberty when they become church-members, and that they confine fraternal regard in the things of the Spirit within much narrower bounds than those to which it would be extended were there no churches in existence. For on the supposition that our Lord had not instituted churches, I believe that Christian

people would have indulged in both freedom of thought and artlessness of expression concerning divine things, and would also have taken part in many recreations, from which most members of Independent churches seem to be debarred. If, indeed, churches were designed for the formation of a public opinion among themselves, according to which the interpretation of the Bible, apprehensions of truth, and views of propriety and duty were to be determined for each member, my complaint would then be their panegyric. But we deny all this to the Church of Rome; and I see no better basis for it in an Independent church. What would not have been wrong, but might even have been laudable, irrespective of church-communion, ought not to be prohibited, or tacitly but significantly condemned, to the parties in that communion. It is true that men can enter into no society without a partial surrender of their liberty. This surrender, however, should extend no farther than the purposes for which the society was formed; and in the case before us it can comprise no sacrifice but such personal convenience and service as may promote arrangements for the common good, and such exercise of censoriousness as might render fellowship

more painful than profitable. What should be gained by church-fellowship is, united action for the common good, and mutual toleration, forbearance, and defence; whereas, according to popular Independency, one great end of the fellowship is, subjection in common to restrictions not specified by statute, but received by tradition from the fathers, and applied according to the caprice and the ignorance of the sons.

It seems to me, too, that another end of church-institutions is the promotion of a universal benevolence, and of an especial brotherly interest in the spiritual welfare of all the Christian people. But unless it can be shown that the spiritual and Christian life is limited to communicants in the Lord's Supper, and, still more narrowly, to such as commune according to Independency, or to polities approximating Independency, I apprehend that the too prevalent practice of our members will be found to accord but ill with the primary idea of a church. For we hear much among us of what is due from one member to another, or from one Independent church to another, and of the family-feeling that should prevail among fellow-members, and of the friendly relations that should unite sister-churches; but as sure as the ramified law

of love is thus habitually presented in an ecclesiastical aspect, so sure it must be that its action shall be unduly restricted, and that what it acquires of artificial intensity among ourselves, it loses of healthful natural expansiveness towards others. Practically, we not only refuse to admit into *our* churches (as, perhaps, we might call them in another sense than that which we intend ; practically, I say, we not only refuse to admit into our churches) numbers of those in whom Christ glories as true members of his church, but we subsequently decline to recognise these at all, unless in exceptional instances, as in truth his people. Just as our attention to our poor is often at once excessive, inasmuch as it disregards other provision for them, and exclusive, causing us to neglect the poor beyond our church-communion, so in interpreting and enforcing Christ's general laws as church-laws, we often, I believe, produce a formal and an affected appearance of love and brotherliness among fellow-members, while comparatively unconcerned for the rights, the feelings, and so for the spiritual welfare, of men who do not walk together with ourselves in things ecclesiastical.

To receive into ecclesiastical fellowship as many believers as desire ; to walk in love and

with becoming respect towards every Christian man for the truth's sake that is in him ; and, also, to honour all men, and to do good to all men ; these laws of the Redeemer's kingdom, obligatory upon all His people, it is especially unseemly that we should set aside, or weaken, or pervert, who beyond our fellow-christians refer for precedents to things as they were at the beginning. And it is in vain that we strive to justify our misinterpretation or our defective application of these laws by the plea that we are jealous for the purity of our fellowship ; or that we fall back upon our trust-deeds, or upon our inveterate usages, as necessitating our continued disregard of the mind of the one Master in these matters. We do but thus expose our unworthiness to hold the ecclesiastical principles that we have taken up, and strengthen the apprehension in those who watch us, that Independency is not for them or for this nation.

But the schismatic and sectarian tendencies of modern Independency will appear yet more clearly when we consider, as I propose that we now do, the modern unions of Independent churches. Till the rise of the Congregational Union of England and Wales, of which I said something in the last lecture, it was the glory

of many Independents that they belonged to no body of Christians that could be justly called a sect, or, in milder phrase, a denomination. The boast was hardly, perhaps, justifiable; for, as we have seen, each individual church becomes a sect, and deserves a designation denoting that it has peculiarities not known in the beginning, as soon as it comes under obligations such as are commonly embraced in our trust-deeds, or commits itself to any uncatholic proceedings. Still, so long as a church, or separate congregation of professed believers, avowing catholicity, and declaring that its innovating peculiarities, if any, are but of secondary or even of inferior importance, so long, I say, as this church, although not acting quite consistently with its profession, yet refrains from entering into a system composed of such churches, so long it is free from all external ecclesiastical control, its innovations acquire but little prominence, and its name may be regarded as asserting nothing incompatible with catholicity. If, however, it once unite with other similar churches, its every future movement is exposed to their judicial criticism; the union of these churches, to the exclusion of those that are unlike them, attracts notice to their uncatholic peculiarities, inasmuch as these evidently consti-

tute their bond of union; as one consequence of all this is, that the life of each church becomes less free, so another is, that bystanders who previously could not adopt the peculiarities, on account of which it has allied itself to other churches, feel the more powerfully repelled from its fellowship; and at last the very name, Independent, or Congregational, for instance, that once expressed nothing incompatible with scriptural principle and precedent, becomes familiarly employed to denote those very usages wherein the united churches depart from catholicity.

It is undeniable, indeed, that long before the rise of the Congregational Union of England and Wales, the tendency to sectarianism of which I now speak, had been developed in the Independent churches of this country. What we call our County-Unions, and other associations of Independent churches, all to some extent exhibited this tendency. But inasmuch as these for the most part professed to undertake one specific business only, the support and the multiplication of such churches, constituting thus a mere Home Missionary Society; inasmuch, too, as for many years the management of these Unions betrayed only the smallest possible amount of what was inconsistent with the strict Independency of

their constituents; while such irregularities on the part of some of the constituents as tended to correct any apparent sectarian or denominational bias were generally tolerated, or even praised, rather than denounced; it was thus brought about that numbers supported these unions for the sake of the good that they effected, though they were quite aware of their erroneousness in principle, and though they would have preferred to see a state of things in which the good might have been achieved without the risk, or the certainty, of evil.

I say, "or the certainty:" for it is in vain to attempt to conceal the fact from ourselves, that a false principle, if once admitted, has a vitiating action. And I have no doubt whatever that, if Independent churches had never associated at all, even though the name Independent, or Congregational, might have been still generally given to them, it would not have become identified, as it now is, with a scholastic theology, a mode of baptism, and that variety of usages to which it is one object of these lectures to call attention. Granting that these uncatholic peculiarities distinguished the churches before their union, yet, as it was on the ground of them that the churches united, rather than on the ground of what was

common to them and other Christians, the union necessarily made the peculiarities more visible, and at the same time diminished the probability of their modification and discountenance.

And as churches by uniting become thus less catholic, so, too, I think it plain that they necessarily lose a degree of independence. For Independency, we must remember, repudiates all external control. I think I have shown that it formally retracts this repudiation when it adopts its trust-deed system; I believe that it no less virtually retracts it when its churches form themselves into a Union. For although the Union may profess none but missionary objects, it must needs, like every society, have respect to its original basis. Established for the attainment of a specific object, it can yet be expected to accomplish this, only as it retains the ground on which it was established. The sympathies prompting to the Union are the life of the Union, whatever be its aim. In the case before us, these sympathies are not such as the churches feel in common with all Christians, or in common with all strictly Independent churches, but such as have no vital connexion with either Christianity or Independency. Even if Independent churches were really catholic, their very union

would by itself affect their Independency. For whatever they may be when they unite, they are to some extent bound to remain such while continuing in the Union; and any departure from the points whereon their common sympathies united them, if not followed by secession, would justly expose them to the risk of excision. This, surely, is not a state of church-independence; at least if independence repudiate all external control. For although the control thus experienced is not coercion, it is in its nature preventive of perfectly free action. And although the restriction upon independence be not expressed by statute, yet it may be no less real than if it were, and may even be more extensive. For when that which will be regarded as a fault is definitely stated, what is not thus forbidden is permitted; whereas if what would be obnoxious is not distinctly known, people may even fear to do that which if done would not be censured.

Modern Independent churches, however, do not unite as catholic churches, but as churches distinguished for much that is very anti-catholic; and the deviation of any of them from what is thus undesirable would be consequently nearly as difficult, and in many cases

would be quite as difficult, as its deviation from some more worthy distinction. For even if fear of a formal censure did not withhold it, fear of a less confidential and cordial treatment by churches to which it has allied itself by special pledge, would act quite as powerfully: and when once a church has allowed itself to feel its individuality absorbed into an organization of churches, the prospect of separation from these and of standing alone, or of such isolation from these as has all the moral effects of a formal separation, is not very different from that of ecclesiastical extinction. A church having such a prospect might say that it would be still a church of Christ as much as it is now; but I apprehend that neither the consciousness of its members nor the sentiments of neighbouring churches would quickly correspond to the declaration. Indeed, the fact that independence has been lost by the act of union, is significantly attested by the difference in a church's bearing before union, and its bearing in view of virtual excision from the Union; notwithstanding the support that we must suppose it to feel in this last case, from consciousness of rectitude in the matter on account of which its separation is deemed necessary. But had there been no union,

it could have acted freely without any unpleasant effects on its relations to other churches; having joined them in a certain aspect, it cannot change that aspect without the apprehension of some painful consequences. It is, therefore, much less independent than it once was, even as it is also more sectarian.

I have already intimated that in the actual operations of the County-Unions, there has been much less serious evil of the kinds now described than there might have been. For since the theory of these Unions has seldom been well defined, individual men of natural nobility of mind and heart, and of views more comprehensive than their brethren's, have been generally found ready to avail themselves of the circumstance so as to resist the attempts of some, perhaps of the more numerous though not the stronger part, to restrict the freedom of the several united churches or pastors, or to show disrespect towards Independent churches that would not unite. And to a slight extent the same counteraction of sectarianism and synodical dictatorialness has been observed in the operations of the Congregational Union of England and Wales; though I think it unquestionable that the sectarian and anti-independent tendencies of all Unions are

much more manifest in the national organization than in any provincial one.

For the National Union has adopted a "Declaration of Faith, Order, and Discipline," without making provision for a change of opinion. It has instituted serial publications, breathing a spirit of intense bigotry, inquisitorial insolence, and coarse dogmatism; and from these, while with a cautiousness that I need not describe it disclaims the responsibility of their contents, it nevertheless draws a large annual revenue. Some of its foremost members have more than once endeavoured to form a committee which would have had the virtual, though the secret, superintendence of the churches, especially those without a pastor.* Its meetings have been fre-

* Such a committee has not yet been appointed; nor is it now likely that it ever will be. It was designed to be a small and nearly irresponsible body, with which churches needing pastors, and pastors needing churches, and any, whether pastors or churches, needing advice, should correspond in confidence; so that the dissolution of existing ecclesiastical relations, and the formation of new relations, might be conducted by the committee to the advantage of all parties. Sufficient independence, however, remained to the members of the Union for the quashing of this scheme; although the expressions of their feelings were not so decided as to prevent the rise of the evil that they dreaded, in a form not amenable to their authority. For much of the power that the committee would have exerted is enjoyed, and is very

quently, perhaps usually, distinguished by the obtrusion of counsels and declarations on the part of its more influential members, such as tended to produce among its constituents a uniformity inconsistent with conscious personal liberty. At its last autumnal meeting in this city, when charges were brought against certain unnamed pastors, charges relating to these men's

banefully put forth, by a few of the most prominent managers of the Union; who, availing themselves of the information that they acquire officially, or officiously, and responsible to no one for their conduct, are the efficient agents in many an arrangement, and in the prevention of many an arrangement, between pastors and churches, to the bewilderment of onlookers who are not acquainted with these men's secret influence.

The editor of the Union's magazines, indeed, allows it to be no secret, but habitually vaunts, that he possesses no small amount of the power of which I am speaking; exhibiting it as both a staff of trust and a rod of terror. Nor do I doubt at all that he and his confidential allies, or retainers, are much more active and mischievous in this way than he intimates. For it is not only his "writing up" of this man, or his "writing down" of another, in the columns of *The British Banner*, also conducted by him, that is potent; it is the private oracles, the affectation of perfect knowledge, the curt and positive judgments on the ground of incommunicable facts, to all which such men are prone from the necessity of their principles, it is these things, together with abundance of whisperings and gossip, that are, perhaps, the chief instruments for the maintenance of their ascendancy. But this matter is again treated a little farther on in the text.

personal deportment at religious meetings, and to their occasional visits to a theatre, instead of such a general protest against the introduction of these charges as would have led to the disregarding of them, the protest made was accompanied with the appointment of a committee to examine them. The Union, moreover, has overstepped its province, not only by uttering opinions respecting certain aspects of the subject of popular education, in which Independent churches as such have no concern, but also by adopting a school-system; thus putting itself, as the chief representative of Independency, in opposition to both the public opinion of the country and the views of a large and most respectable minority of its own constituents, on a matter that furnished no rightful place for its appearance.*

* A more unfortunate measure for the Union, in respect of its width and its vigour, could hardly have been adopted. It has increased its business; but at the expense of the necessary alienation of many who were, or who would have been, its most enlightened supporters. This, however, is its concern, not mine. But both I and every Independent have a right to protest; first, against its identification of Independency with opposition to what is called by a very infelicitous misnomer, "National Education;" and, secondly, against its identification of Independency with what can never be virtually anything else than

It is proper to observe, too, that that particular Union of Independent churches, the Scottish, which served as the principal model for the Southern, and whose most prominent upholder assisted in the formation of this latter, having existed for more than fifty years, and thus had opportunity to exhibit some of the ulterior consequences of inherent tendencies, has betrayed its constituents into departures from Independency, whose grossness and audacity correspond to its age. To such a length has it carried organization, that it professes not to know the existence of any Independent churches in the country except such as are its members; thus identifying Independency and membership in itself. For instance, few, if any, of its churches will acknowledge a member of another church

sectarian education, the conducting of general education in connexion with a church. I retain all my long felt objections to the so-called "National Education." But I have no doubt that sectarian education is an evil, if second, second only to such schemes as were intended by the "National;" and I believe it to be a greater evil than such "National Education" as is enjoyed in the United States.—Let me take this opportunity of adding, that while as decidedly opposed as ever to "National Education," I regret that, in the intense public excitement of the year 1848, I did not treat some of its supporters with more respectful courtesy in an article of mine in the *Eclectic Review*.

as a member of a Christian society, if this latter church be not in the Union.* Meanwhile, some of its constituents have claimed, and without protest from it have exercised, the right of inquiring into the doctrines preached to others, and of withdrawing from fellowship with them, on the ground that these doctrines were not altogether what were reputed among Independents to be orthodox; although the public correspondence divulged nothing that in the esteem of most men should have rendered individual men obnoxious to excommunication from a Christian church. The Northern Union and the Southern might just as well excommunicate each other on the ground of the great difference between them that corre-

* Ministerial members of it have even refused to accredit brethren when leaving the country, only because these have not acted in conformity with a resolution passed at an annual meeting of the Union, from which resolution they dissented, which did not concern the objects of the Union, and which had not been introduced before it but in violation of integrity. Both ministers and deacons, too, have defended the position, and some have acted on it, that no minister should preach to their churches who admitted into his pulpit a minister, myself, who had never been a member of the Union, but at whom a resolution irregularly passed at one of its meetings, the resolution previously mentioned, had been indirectly aimed, and whose only offence was that, having no honourable alternative, he had openly expressed his views of the dishonesty of a member of the Union.

spondence, I apprehend, would bring to light on the subject of what is called National Education.

But, perhaps, it is rather in the more private and indirect action of such Unions than in their projected and public conduct, that we must look for their worst results. No church, it must be remembered, acts in a Union but by means of its pastor and two or more lay delegates. Of the delegates appointed it is seldom, perhaps, that more than one-half can attend the most central meetings of the County-Unions, or that the attendance of these can be given for more than a few hours; while it must be very rare, if ever, that one-tenth of the pastors in England and Wales, or that more than one delegate on an average for every twenty churches, can be present at the chief meetings of the National Union. Were all the business that is transacted at the annual meetings of these various bodies known to the churches before their appointment of delegates, they could then select such delegates as would act in accordance with the wish of the majority of the church. But it would be impossible thus to pre-acquaint the churches with all the particular questions that occur at the annual meetings, relative to the known business of the Union. Even on such questions, therefore, it may come to pass

that a delegate's vote is not such as his church will approve; while it is not at all unlikely that the votes of pastors on many important points will outweigh the votes of all the delegates.

But even at County-Union meetings, and still more at the meetings of the National Union, matters are often introduced quite foreign to the legitimate business of the occasion. And as such matters are necessarily postponed till the more regular business of the Unions is completed, and, indeed, are frequently brought forward not at formal meetings, but after a dinner or some other interval, it thus comes to pass that no few resolutions are adopted, and the Unions are committed to no few positions, of which even the chief part of the pastors and delegates who have attended to the regular business, know nothing till they learn it from public advertisement, or from the minutes when read a year afterwards. Now, not to speak of important acts of injustice to individuals that have thus been perpetrated, the Unions have often been thus made responsible for measures whose damaging influence on Independency has been discovered, when too late, to be even enormous. And when we bear in mind that observers, especially observers in high poli-

tical stations, who may investigate the sayings and doings of Independency, are sure to direct their keenest gaze to the conduct of the Unions of which Independents make so loud a boast, we can feel but grief and shame at the anomalies that with acute and practised eye they must soon discern, and at the conclusions that they are sure to reach concerning the modified Presbyterianism that passes for Independency. For this kind of Independency is a church-polity which, without the perfect and well-sustained system of representative government that distinguishes legitimate Presbyterianism, without its business-like order and despatch, and without its invaluable safeguard of publicity, has all its faults of bending a minority of churches to the will of a majority, of diffusing responsibility among all for the actions of a part, and of accumulating great power in the hands of a few individuals over congregations dispersed through a whole country.

May I be allowed to digress for a minute or two from my proper path, in order to make a remark in anticipation of such an objection to Independency itself, as that which I have urged against pseudo-Independency and Presbyterianism? For it might be said, as I have, indeed,

often heard it said, that when arguing in opposition to the union of churches, I equally oppose the union of individual Christians in churches; the minority in respect of any matter discussed in a church being of course under obligation to submit to the majority. And the objection is both too specious and too reasonable to be evaded: it is susceptible, however, of a satisfactory answer.

For when individuals unite in a church, we must suppose them to unite for no objects that are beyond the control that they can exercise in common, and for none concerning which every man will not have a suitable opportunity for expressing his opinion, and for exerting power corresponding to his responsibility. If, after all, the decision be one in which an individual feels himself bound by conscience not to acquiesce, there is, of course, no alternative but his withdrawal from the fellowship. I apprehend, however, that only an unenlightened conscience could thus oblige a man; for if the matter be a matter fit for introduction before the church, that is, if it be a matter that concerns the church as a church, then, since every individual member has equal power and opportunity with any of his brethren to affect the ultimate decision, I see not that any man

can be bound not to acquiesce in the practical conclusion adopted by his brethren, whether he concur in that conclusion or not. To approve it, or to act in accordance with it, is one thing; to leave it alone, and peaceably to allow others to carry it out, is another; and although a man might feel conscientiously forbidden to do the former, it does not follow that he is in like manner forbidden to do the latter. The reverse, indeed, would be evidently the dictate of a well-instructed conscience.

In unions of churches, however, where the representative principle is adopted, individuals are often, and even entire churches are occasionally, held in subjection to decisions, in the formation of which they have had no share, and for the prevention of which they have had no opportunity. And it is this representative principle, rather than a difference of opinion concerning eldership, or the mere fact of Presbyterian congregations' subjection to some central authority, that I regard as the specific essence of the Presbyterian system; nor do I see that Independents, if they adopt it, can with any propriety retain their distinctive designation.

But returning from this digression, I would remind you that in a late remark I anticipated

a matter that deserves distinct attention; I mean the prodigious power which a few pastors and official people must necessarily acquire by means of the machinery of the National Union. The same is true, as it regards tendency, of every County-Union also. For pastors, much more than delegates, have facilities for attending regularly to the business of the Unions; and as they can thus attend year after year, while the delegates are a variable body, the ambitious among them, and still more especially the permanent officers of the organization, if ambitious, can scarcely fail to become persons of undue importance. In County-Unions, however, the pastors who can attend the meetings are usually so numerous as to act to an important degree as a mutual check; besides which, as they have much other mutual intercourse, any ambition natural to some of them is generally so associated with juster and more amiable feelings towards their brethren, as to prove nearly harmless. And whatever in some counties I might be constrained to say of the abuse of their position by the Union's chief officials, in the county of Lancaster, of whose Union I have a more intimate knowledge than of any other, after referring to what I must maintain is the general tendency in all Unions,

namely, to uplift their officers into positions of undesirable because incalculable and irresponsible power, my strain must immediately become one of admiring and cordial eulogy of the large-heartedness, the jealous protection of brethren's independence, and the readiness to succour those who may have seemed wrongfully depressed by other men's self-assertion or usurpation, that have usually distinguished both its chief and its inferior secretaries.

But of the chief executive, whether the past or the present, of the Congregational Union of England and Wales, and of their more confidential counsellors and correspondents, whether in the metropolis or in the country, I can say nothing eulogistic. The ministers and the laymen are necessarily very few, who can give the time requisite to take an active part, together with the paid officials, in the affairs of this vast organization : and the power consequently shared by the officers and their most intimate associates is enormous. In constant communication with the pastors and the most prominent laymen throughout the country, often travelling to and fro on the business of the churches, and administering the funds of the Home Missionary Society and the Colonial Missionary Society, as well as

those derived from the sale of the Union's Magazines, not to speak of their influence in the Irish Evangelical Society, these men thus necessarily become the recipients of the most important confidence respecting the condition of the churches, and the virtual dispensers of what may well be called an immense amount of patronage. From the nature of the case it must be impossible, unless in rare exceptions, to substantiate against them any charge of intermeddling, of dictation, or of any impropriety towards their constituents, but what might be resolved into occasional imprudence. Annual votes of thanks, too, and of continued confidence, might be as easily procured for them again as they have been already. Woe, indeed, to the man who alone confronts them and says plainly, "I do not trust you!" Whether he speak or whether he print it, all the secret machinery of the Union, and no little of its open machinery also, will be set in motion to annoy, to disparage, and, if possible, to ruin him.* By combining, or con-

* The verification of the foregoing in the conduct of the most powerful leader of the Southern Congregational Union during and since its meetings in this present year, 1856, is well worthy of the notoriety that it has acquired. As an instance of the effect produced on disinterested and enlightened observers by the

spiring, with others, he might have formed a party whose systematic and sustained attacks no such rickety organization as a large union of Independent churches must always be, could have long resisted : but men of integrity shrink from conspiracies, and men of peace from combinations, against a society of which they are members.

conduct of this strange boaster and his backers, I quote the following from a leading article in the *Morning Sun* of May 19, 1856 : "The fact that to the meetings of these representative assemblies reporters are not admitted, except ignorantly or by favour, indicates at once the cause of the little publicity they obtain, and of the greater publicity they need for their own purity, as well as for the general information. . . . In our judgment, the men who, while professing ultra-Protestant principles, concoct newspaper and pulpit conspiracies to crush the professional character and blast the prospects of a young ministerial author, are the most mischievous papists extant in this country. Therefore it is that we introduce to our readers certain protestant editors and religious critics. The Nonconformist bodies are the historical champions of English liberty. They have produced heroes, martyrs, aye and conquerors, for the popular cause. They have been the nurses of free thought, the guardians of pure faith, the pioneers of political progress. They were never, in proportion to the entire population, so numerous and wealthy as now. They were, therefore, never so capable as now of doing honour to their principles and service to their country. Yet do we find them submitting to be tutored by an amateur theologian and a representative 'brother' into the suppression of all literary aspiration and all intellectual activity."

Yet for all this I know no feeling more general throughout the Independent churches, and especially among the more retiring pastors, and the more enlightened and observant of their people, than that of fear of the secret, untraceable, but, as they think, real, great, and not salutary influence, of the most prominent managers of this important confederation. And my residence in Scotland has been sufficiently long, and my intimacy with pastors there sufficiently close, to speak at least as strongly of the Northern as of the Southern Union. It is enough, perhaps, to add here in respect of the leaders of both associations, that from all that I can learn, there is not one of them who is trusted by his brethren.

I have alluded once or twice to the periodical publications of the English Congregational Union; their importance, however, demands that they be distinctly considered. As any publication by a Union must necessarily depend chiefly on either a small committee or a single man, it will be at once evident, after the foregoing remarks, that to publish can hardly come within the province of a Union of churches; responsibility extending disproportionately to power of control; and the entire body being chargeable with the work of a few individuals. Serial publications will, of

course, be much more objectionable than any other ; the evil contained in them, if any, not attracting so much attention ; the medium, because insinuative, being better adapted to a mind ambitious and of evil designs ; and it being much more difficult to close a serial, or to change its editor, than to prevent a new edition of a standard work, or the publication of a second such. But of all serial publications, those which professedly treat of the state of the churches represented in the publications, and aim at their improvement, must be by much the most dangerous ; inasmuch as the statements and the advices made in them come to the individual churches with an indefinite authority that can be neither estimated nor defied, while unless formally disapproved by the Union, spectators have a warrant to regard them as approved by it, and form correspondent conceptions of Independency.

The Scottish Union has a magazine of this description ; but it is too feeble in execution, and its range is too limited, to deserve further notice ; although on the magazines of the Southern Union I am constrained to offer a few more observations. Together with thousands, I at first, though no member of the Union, and though believing it unwise for the Union to

commence authorship, yet rejoiced at the prospect of a cheap and instructive periodical literature adapted to the poorer and less educated Independents. But within a short time I became fully persuaded that the magazines would prove one of the greatest calamities ever suffered by our churches ; so dogmatic, dictatorial and truculent was their spirit ; so rigid was the church-system that they advocated ; so low and democratical were the social manners that they were likely to form among our members ; so nauseously fulsome were their praises when they praised ; and so fell and unscrupulous were their censures when they censured. In course of time, even the Union itself rebelled against this literary leadership ; and though at first it seemed as if Sinbad would deliver himself from his heavy fate, yet the ultimate result was to the great dishonour of the rebellious. For they continued to support the offending official, and contented themselves with his assumption of the sole responsibility for his proceedings ; while all the world that cared about the matter knew that he had boldly set them at defiance, that he gloried in all that he had done, and that the conflict had ended in his acquisition of a less restricted personal liberty, and in their real though unavowed subjection to a chief

whom they had been ashamed to acknowledge as their spokesman.

And in a little while the evil was unspeakably aggravated. For the editor of the Union's magazines publicly became the conductor of a weekly newspaper also, over which the Union had not even the semblance of control. And as instead of exonerating him thereupon from the charge of its periodicals, it gave some few though informal tokens of satisfaction, while negatively it allowed him to think that he was approved, a general feeling, and, I believe, a just one, was thus excited in the public, that although the Union found it convenient not to stand beneath the *Banner*, it regarded the new combatant as an ally, and consented to a reciprocity of assistance between the forces, and to a community of characteristics. And the consequences to the national reputation of Independency have been mournfully disastrous. Never was cause so damaged by the officiousness of friendship. Never did ally drag his confederate through mire so deep and foul. Never was a client's character so lowered by the conduct of his advocate. In vain do Independents refer to the more wary and aged *Patriot*, or to the juster and less sectarian *Nonconformist*, or to the farther-seeing *Eclectic*, or to the more philoso-

phical *British Quarterly*, as indicators of both their political and their literary views. The man who upholds THE BANNER is the man whom the National Union chose, and whom, since he uplifted *The Banner*, the Union has repeatedly chosen, to be its *Witness*, both of and to the churches; and from that man's various writings more than from all other channels will the world at large form their conceptions of modern Independency, its creed, its order, its discipline, its spirit, its policy, and its adaptation to the nation's wants. Nor do I think that, however some protest against this, the world will thus act otherwise than justly.*

I forbear to describe more particularly the periodicals on which I have thus animadverted.

* Every word in this paragraph, it should be remembered, was publicly delivered in the year 1854. In 1856, the more respectable members of the Union find to their unspeakable mortification, that they themselves are castigated with the knotted scorpions whose action upon others had amused them, or elicited their grave approval. But for the goodness of the cause that meanwhile was suffering in the shaking hands of some among them, a smile not ill-natured might have been worn by a few of their forbearing and sincere well-wishers, as we saw them writhing underneath the vigorous strokes of their dreaded and pitiless Coupe-Tête. They showed themselves to be weak, however; and they were weak, I apprehend, because they were consciously guilty. They would not have been in due form, I grant, in joining the men, or the man, who declined to thank

They must be too well known to you to require such description. And though it is possible to become so accustomed to the sight and to the sound of what is evil as to lose emotion at the

the editor of the Union's serials because the editor of *The Banner* had committed faults. But why did they not assist their friend by proposing as a substitute for his course, that the confidence of the Union in the editor of their magazines was weakened by his conduct as the editor of *The Banner*? This would have been in form; and it would not be easy to understand why it, or something like it, was not proposed, did we not know that the men who could have concurred in it were men who, if not by act yet tacitly, had connived at the proceeding by which their manœuvring editor obtained a newspaper channel for the discharge of the abuse for which they had not been willing that their own magazines should be the organ of communication.

"Thus conscience does make cowards of us all."

In silence, well-pleased or ill-pleased they know best, but in silence had these men witnessed many an act of wrong and of unfeeling cruelty by the Frankenstein of their creation; and therefore was it that they were obliged to bear with tolerable meekness his somewhat fierce attack upon themselves.

I speak of men reported to be sensitive to what "churchmen" say of them. Let them read the following, then, as a specimen of many censures like it, and they will see to what reproaches their love of unionism and their dread of publicity (they still hold two meetings of the Union every year with closed doors, and their other meetings are but pseudo-public) have assisted to expose our glorious Independency: "We live under a religious tyranny of the most degrading and unscrupulous description; for it is exercised chiefly, though not exclusively,

re-occurrence of it, yet if you will only follow the impulse that I have sought to supply in these lectures, and endeavour to see Independency "as others see it" when reflected in such by anonymous writers who, too often successfully, attempt to obtain by the basest acts of flattery, falsehood, and intimidation, that influence from which their stupidity and insignificance would otherwise debar them. We have already described the malignant virulence with which one great party in the Church of England is tyrannized over by a paper by which it most unwisely allows itself to be caricatured. . . . The dissenting bodies live under a similar and, if possible, a still more degrading bondage." From an article entitled "Publicans and Sinners" in the *Saturday Review*, April 26, 1856.

I know that the foregoing passage was aimed primarily at Mr. James Grant of the *Morning Advertiser*. But it was aimed at him as for the time the representative of the party whose standard is *The Banner*. Those writings of his, too, which drew forth the foregoing remarks, bear internal evidence that they were prepared with the cognisance and approval of Dr. Campbell; and besides, Dr. Campbell in *The Banner* has expressed his unqualified adoption of all their significance and spirit.

Or let my brethren of the Union who begin to doubt the wisdom of some of their past proceedings, ponder well the following quotation from a very charming little book already noticed, the late Rev. Mr. Robertson's *Lectures on the Influence of Poetry*:— "If working men are to gain their notions of Christianity from the sneering, snarling gossip of the religious newspapers, I, for one, do not marvel that indignant infidelity is common among them. A detracting and deprecating spirit is the curse and bane both of the religion and the literature of our day; that spirit which has no sympathy with aught that is great beyond

mirrors as these publications, you will, perhaps, come to regard them as I do, with intense dislike and indignation. For myself it is but right to say that the sentiments now expressed have been long known as mine to all my intimate acquaintance, and shared by them. I say this lest, peradventure, it should be supposed that I have spoken in resentment of the indignities and diverse wrongs that I have myself recently suffered at the hands of the reckless men who, with few exceptions, divide among themselves the conduct of the inferior part of what passes as the religious press. It was the inflexible front that I presented against Unions as denominationalism, often, too, when I stood altogether alone, together with my preference of morality to an unscriptural spiritualism, and of righteous men not ecclesiastical to unrighteous men who were very ecclesiastical, it was this that exposed me to their unprincipled attacks, when by the surrender of truth and honour to an ecclesiastical party I should have secured

the pale of customary formalities, and sheds its blighting influence over all that is enthusiastic, generous, and high-minded. It is possible for a sneer or a cavil to strike sometimes a superficial fact; I never knew the one or the other reach the deep heart and blessedness of truth."—Pp. 39, 40.

their highest plaudits. By my present service I shall again, I suppose, evoke all that they can do against me; but they have not a weapon in their arsenal that can pierce my armour. They may make a great noise, in hope of causing quiet people to turn away from the occasion of so much unpleasant disturbance; but beyond that they have little power.*

* They did what I expected; at least they procured unknown agents to do it for them; and thus again for a time I was the "best abused man" in the "religious world," or in that province of it in which Congregational Unions have power. But I should have expunged the foregoing paragraph, and have kept this volume altogether free from such personal references, had I not felt that this might have been pardonably misconstrued by many. It might be wise to elucidate the text fully for the sake of such readers as are not acquainted with the circumstances to which I have alluded; but I shall content myself with a very few additional remarks.

Sydney Smith's question concerning such men as those of whom I complain, "Who is there among them that would not glory to lie for the tabernacle?" suggests all that I could wish to say. To whatever they have alleged, and to whatever they have insinuated, in defamation of me and my friends, I give one general but absolute contradiction; and to any reputable people who desire a more particular explanation, I will render it, either publicly or privately, as to such men I have at all times rendered the like hitherto. But for men who will sacrifice all things to party I have not a word. Apparently unable to recognise righteous conduct when they see it, (see foot-note, p. 149,) or utterly disbelieving in the Divine recognition of it,

But beside the unions of which I have spoken, we not unfrequently hear of more private associations of ministers alone, the pastors in a large town or in a district. And it might seem an some of our maligners find it impossible to impute to us any but the basest motives. Proceedings so direct, so open, so self-sacrificing, that imputations of guile or of corruption were regarded by some of us as not conceivable, have been the subject of these men's ingenious scrutiny and conspiring gossip for years. They remind me of a passage in chap. xxxviii. of Scott's *Life of Napoleon Buonaparte*, from which, indeed, they might have taken their cue. "Napoleon well knew the influence produced on the public mind by ringing the changes to different time on the same unvaried subject. The ideas which are often repeated in all varieties of language and expression, will at length produce an effect on the public mind, especially if no contradiction is permitted to reach it. A uniform which may look ridiculous on a single individual, has an imposing effect when worn by a large body of men; and the empiric whose extravagant advertisement we ridicule upon the first perusal, often persuades us, by sheer dint of repeating his own praises, to make trial of his medicine. Those who practise calumny know, according to the vulgar expression, that if they do but throw dirt sufficient some part of it will adhere."

The deadliest blows ever given to Independency in either North Britain or South, have been given by these editors and their supporters. I am told, and I believe it, that in the ordinary intercourse of society they appear to be just men and men of a genial heartiness; yet as soon as they take pen in hand for the support of anything relating to their party, no dependence can be any longer placed upon them. They write as if what was written were not within the range of moral government. Truth, can-

extreme position to deny the right of pastors to associate for their common interests; although I confess myself always to have shrunk from the assertion of such a right, and uniformly to have dour, modesty, moderation, whatsoever is righteous, and whatsoever is gentle, seem to vanish from their chambers at the production of pen and ink. The consequence is, whatever they may preach, that the gospel according to the Independents is rapidly becoming to the public eye a gospel that is not according to godliness. They have prolonged the unnatural divorce between faith and works, between religion and morality; and to be "evangelical" exposes a man now to be suspected of fraud. For their wrong doing they will care, perhaps, very little; but it should affect even them that, according to the code of one fit to be a Rabbi of their party, they have committed "what is worse than a crime, even a blunder."

Long as this note is I must still lengthen it, that I may enrich it with the following extract made by me from *The Times* many years ago. I know not the date of the number from which I made it, but I believe it to have been in the spring of the year 1850.

"Of all the tyrannies that molest this terrestrial scene, perhaps there is none so arbitrary, so extravagant, or so grotesque, as the tyranny of party. There is none that so frequently subjects the wise to the caprices of the fool, and the good to the designs of the knave. When the cry of faction is once raised, any two or three noodles may draw up a manifesto, false in its statements, absurd in its reasoning, and unchristian in its tone, and forthwith secure the ready signatures and enthusiastic support of many hundred men. It is quite lamentable to see what we have seen,—a thousand men or more underwriting a document which leaks at every sentence, and can do nothing but founder. The men who get up these things are no better than

declined entering into any such an association, even while hereby exposing myself to some misrepresentation and odium, and losing much profitable enjoyment. But all such associations must necessarily tend, I think, in some degree to produce, or to maintain, that sectarian denominationalism which I cannot but regard as anti-christian. Their semi-private nature may, indeed, render them less obnoxious than the public unions to this charge, inasmuch as their members are less deeply pledged by a private act than by

ecclesiastical banditti, and care about as little for the consciences of their victims as the robber of purses does for the lives of their owners. The greatest intellects, the finest dispositions, and, what is more, the most cultivated understandings, will often lie prostrate before the assault of a fellow without two ideas in his head, merely because the latter presents a stupid address for immediate signature, of course, like the Spanish brigands, in the name of the ALMIGHTY. Woe to the man who, once enrolled in the lists of the party, has the courage to refuse, or even to hesitate. It is in vain to plead that he can't agree to this or that clause, or even that he dislikes the movement altogether, or even that he has publicly committed himself to a wholly different and contradictory view;—it matters not; if he refuses he is a traitor, and there is an end of him. So extensive is the ruin we have witnessed from these spiritual depredations, that as a general rule we should recommend all our younger readers, whether clerical or academic, to shut their doors against agitators and thieves, and to treat the man who presents an address or a petition just as they would a man who presented a pistol."

a public; though I cannot anticipate an expanded catholicity among the leaders of any sect who periodically meet as such for private conference. It is, however, in another aspect that I chiefly view such associations with apprehension. For I cannot separate a pastor's interests from those of his church, or deem him alone a sufficient representative of his church. If pastors have distinct interests from their churches, churches have distinct interests from their pastors; and if pastors can legitimately hold regular conferences concerning the matters that are common to them, I see not why churches also cannot thus associate in relation to their common interests, and this, too, with closed doors, to the exclusion of their pastors. Indeed I have heard of associations of the deacons in a city; and though such organizations are not likely to live long, this is only because their incongruity is striking, and their members are unable to devote time enough to make the organization effective.

But I see no less incongruity in pastors' organization than in deacons'; and as I believe that the practical consequences of pastors' associations have been the palliating rather than the correcting of faults committed by powerful or popular members; the persecuting and

the oppressing of such members, or other ministers, as have made themselves troublesome by their independent spirit, and have at the same time belonged to the family of the unfortunates ; the subjugating of young ministers to the general opinion of the little fraternity ; the exerting of the moral force of the united pastors in prevention of many a single church's free action, or in opposition to it ; the originating of schemes for public action according to the partial and, I may say, professional views of ministers ; and even in many cases the formation of committees, which might be termed committees of vigilance, or consulting committees, to which all neighbouring churches and pastors are invited to repair for the aid that they may need, but which, under the name of sympathy and counsel, can hardly fail to put forth painless and invisible but real restrictions on the liberty of their clients ; as I believe, I say, that such consequences as these always result to a greater or a less degree from pastors' associations, according as they comprise many members or few, I, of course, feel that any theoretical objection to them is sustained upon experiment.*

* During the Peninsular war, the committee of a regimental mess had formed the habit of intermeddling with other matters

Some little time ago I mentioned three societies for missionary purposes, which are affiliated, thus I think they say, to the National Union. These, however, are not the only public societies which Independent churches as such support almost as a matter of course. The London Missionary Society is the chief of all; though some churches

than those for which they had been appointed; availing themselves of their position for the object of exchanging opinions upon the conduct of their brother officers, and of putting the general result in circulation, or of causing it to be felt, through the regiment, and beyond it. In course of time one and another of their colleagues found themselves shunned and variously aggrieved, without being able to detect the cause or to unmask their maligners. In the *Wellington Despatches*, under the date of March 11, 1818, may be found a manly and masterful letter from the Commander-in-Chief in relation to such matters. The whole is too long for quotation; but after explaining the difference between each officer's acting towards every other according to his independent conviction of the merits of each, and the course adopted when a few officers privately and irresponsibly agree to support each other in a definite system of conduct towards a real or a supposed offender, the writer adds, "In the former case every officer judges and acts for himself, and he discourages misconduct or neglect of duty by his opinion and demeanour towards those guilty of either. He does not bend his opinion even to that of a whole mess; which, I am sorry to say experience has shown, sometimes acts in the spirit and on the principle of combination; much less does he shape his conduct according to the opinion of a committee of that mess."

ally themselves to various other associations also. And to me it seems that practical evils result from all such alliances. Into the question of general associations for religious purposes it is no part of my duty to enter. But it appears to me a serious evil, when a Christian church as such is so connected with any other association as to be responsible in the public esteem for its principles and proceedings. It is unquestionably a very convenient arrangement for these non-ecclesiastical societies to employ a church's machinery and premises for the promotion of their specific objects, and to effect such a state of general feeling, that a church declining to attach itself to them shall be viewed with suspicion by other churches. But when I remember that the managers of these societies are not chosen by the churches, but really by a few individuals in the metropolis, who are seldom known to the churches, and whose social responsibility is a mere figment ; that the agents of these societies are still less than the managers beneath the control of the churches ; that, indeed, churches as such have seldom any power at all, the legal power generally residing in the subscribers to a certain annual amount, and in the pastors whose churches make an annual collection for the fund ;

that it would be impossible, even if legal, for churches to exert any real energy in the guidance of these societies' affairs; that nevertheless the character of the churches is at the disposal of agents in all parts of the globe; and that frequently our Independency has been grievously misrepresented in consequence; when I remember things like these, I am compelled to deny the propriety of the alliance, and to maintain that a church and every missionary society ought to remain mutually distinct.

As I have already intimated, no inference can be justly drawn from these remarks against any church-member's becoming a member of other societies also, or doing whatever he pleases in their support. Nor would any man object to a pastor's occasional public recommendation of any society to the support of his people, that in the exercise of his discretion he deemed worthy of it. Nor need the facility of collecting for a society in a church be as a matter of course refused to all applications for it, whether occasionally made or periodically. All this could be done, and could be defended on general principles, without any one's supposing that a church was implicated in a society's procedures. But in most Independent churches it is usual to go far beyond this.

Either by assumption of the obligation, or by express resolution, most of our churches have become subsidiary organs to various societies for religious purposes. Our church-machinery, indeed, might be regarded by some people as if constructed for the express purpose of facilitating the action of other institutions. Our very doors are continually placarded with public notices offensive to some or other of our attendants. Congregational petitions to Parliament concerning matters that affect us not as churches, act in a still more obnoxious manner. Our pulpits even are annoyingly laid under requisition for the like objects. The editors of most of our cheaper religious serials make it a matter of business to apply for public ministerial recommendations of their several organs. And even to such an extent is the principle carried, that publishers of religious books, print-sellers, and the agents of assurance companies, all in turn attempt to secure the good offices of our pastors by the promise of donations, or of discount, thus using a church-official as a convenient commercial agent.

The great evil, however, is the virtual connexion of a church with any other society. It should be assumed of no church that it is incom-

plete for its own objects. Not preventing but earnestly encouraging whatever good works its several members may please to do, either separately or in association with any people, let the church's aim be confined to the spiritual preparation of its members for all duties. If, indeed, opportunity arises for such efforts on behalf of others as it can conduct without preventing more expedient action, to these spheres of exertion it is of course summoned by the same calls which summon any individuals, or any other society, to the like efforts. But let every institution, be it a church or be it any other society, pursue its own specific object by its own appropriate machinery and in its own peculiar path. Then there need be, and there would be, neither collision nor offence; whereas the present practice operates greatly to a church's damage, even if the other institutions also do not ultimately suffer.

But it is the church's interests in which we are now concerned; and, certainly, churches will be popularly disesteemed if the societies with which they are connected are mismanaged. Officers of these societies have been known to abuse the entrance obtained by them among the churches, in the same way in which I have

already shown it to be abused by officials of the National Union. In most of the churches a large amount of serious disaffection exists against one society or another ; and as it is easy neither to allay nor to gratify it, the church's internal life is impaired. Many observant parties in our congregations dislike the thought of joining a church, because they see that they would be expected to act towards these societies according to the church's present vogue. And as many churches, having once adopted the practice of connecting themselves with such societies, have extended it till they have become correspondents, and even members, of both political associations and such as, aiming at moral or philanthropic ends, yet do not necessarily or by profession bear the name of Christ and teach His truth, it has thus come to pass that catholicity has been the more contracted, that numbers of Christian people have been repelled from union with us, and that discussions and strifes have been introduced among us to a lamentable extent.

Even if societies for any object are confined formally or in effect to a church and congregation, it is impossible, I believe, to exclude a decided preponderance of evil. Such societies may be for purposes of humanity, as Dorcas societies

and the like; or they may be literary, such as reading-societies or discussion-meetings. These are seldom, perhaps, originated by distinct church-action ; occasionally, indeed, they are formed in secret, and almost clandestinely. Perhaps, too, they do not profess to exclude constituents of other churches ; although the evident aim of their promoters is to make such associations auxiliaries to their respective churches. But the general effects of all such movements can be confidently predicted without extraordinary sagacity. Rivalry and collision between the humane organizations of different churches, together with the most mischievous counteraction of the cares of individuals, not to speak of the occasional interference with more extensive and catholic institutions; in respect of the literary organizations, the cultivation of the intellect in a narrow instead of an open sphere, and under specific rather than under general influences, together with the withdrawal of the religious principles and the spiritual feelings from the bracing discipline of free life in mixed literary society to the enervating confinement of a section of a sect, a church in a church, where either morbid sensitiveness or servile subjection to the ascendancy of one or two members is, perhaps,

inevitable; in respect of all, the formation of sects, parties, factions, in a church, and the contempt of onlookers who rejoice in their freedom from church-influences, such, I apprehend, are the sure consequences of all these artificial church-aids.

It is often represented among Independents, that each church ought to be like a family; the plea being that the Divine design in church-union is to educate the religious feelings in connexion with the social. There is truth, I think, in the plea; for unquestionably our spiritual education is likely to be the more complete, if it be conducted in part in those circumstances in which the general human sympathies can be best excited together with the religious feelings; that is, if we meet with all classes of men for religious worship and meditation in common. But the plea must not be allowed to rule over us without a limit; and it seems to me that it reaches its due limit, just before it would come into collision with social laws that no less than ecclesiastical arrangements are divine. Such are the laws according to which, were no church in existence, men would form acquaintance and intimate companionship, and would institute general associations for literary, humane, and such religious

objects as are not proposed in the church-union. Does the church-union, now, supersede the action of those general laws, and provide that its members shall associate among themselves for such general purposes as have been specified ? Few Independents, perhaps, would like to affirm this ; although very much in their popular declamation and their ordinary conduct sanctions it. I deny it altogether, and maintain that church-union is healthful, beneficial, and not in various ways mischievous, only as it does not interfere with free action in general society. I believe that we never form a single association in virtual connexion with a church, without exerting a repelling force on many of those who observe us, and who, although otherwise they might have respected us, now doubt the general tendency of our institutions. Meanwhile, for the members of a church, or of churches, to confine their exchanges or their community of thought, their co-operative efforts for good, and their social pleasures, to themselves and their dependents, is a course that can issue in nothing better than the gradual deterioration of all concerned. It is not unlike, in some respects, the intermarriage of cousins, or any other policy that isolates one class from another.

I much fear that even the noblest domestic institution ever associated with our churches has been so carelessly administered as to excite great and threatening evils. But, for its Sunday Schools, the condition of England* would have been long ere this appalling; unless, indeed, it had pleased God to provide some other and, to us now, perhaps, some inconceivable remedy. Yet the present, and still more the expected progress of secular education during the week, the peculiar characteristics of some localities, and various practical evils that have gradually sprung up in some of our schools, suggest to many of their more thoughtful friends the probable necessity of more or less modification.

Nothing but an irresistible pressure of conviction could induce me to say a word to the dishonour of the present condition of Sunday Schools among us. But I feel with many that our Sunday School system has become a most irregular adjunct to Independency, and that it threatens so to intwine many of our churches as to stunt their stem and nobler branches, and prevent the choicer fruit of which they are

* Scottish readers will please to observe that, together with much in other parts of the lectures, almost all that I say in respect of Sunday Schools applies exclusively to the English.

capable. The frequent allegations that numbers of our churches, even in the cities and large towns, derive their chief additions by means of the Sunday Schools, and that the schools are their life and their support, are to my mind justification of my apprehensions; for such words only indicate to me that our churches are ineffective to attract the more educated British mind, and that we can make few disciples but among the more ignorant and credulous.

I know no theory of Independency according to which a Sunday School should be, I say not an appendage to a church, but a department of its cares, except this; that a church should provide for the Christian instruction of such young people, just as it should for the Christian instruction of such adults, as will receive it from them, and can be taught through no more suitable machinery. This I can understand; and I can conceive of no application of this principle that should fail to prove conducive to a church's legitimate objects. Nor am I punctilious for such an application of this principle as would repel the overtures of any, because not members of the church, to aid in the instruction; or for such as would exclude all secular instruction on the Lord's day. These points have no relation

to my subject; nor would I thus refer to them but in prevention of possible misconstruction. I can suppose, then, a church, in all consistency and in much wisdom, to appoint a willing committee of its members to act, of course under the oversight of its pastor, in providing for the specific instruction of young people, and to report progress to the church from time to time. Such a committee could receive aid from quarters beyond the church, and, if it thought it desirable, could, farther, devolve upon the actual teachers the choice of their officers, the making of their arrangements, and the determining of all that should be taught and that should be done; subject, of course, to the committee's sanction. I can suppose this, I have said. I might have said that we have all known this, and often; and we have seen in such schools some of the most delightful fruits of a pastor's labours, evidences of a church's life, and elements for the church's augmentation. I would repeat, then, in regard to schools, what I have already said in regard to other matters; that, in general, it is the administration that is faulty, rather than the theory; though I believe that the faultiness is often considerable, and is almost always very manifest.

And in some cases, perhaps, the first construction of our school-system is erroneous. For we hear of teachers acting as a corporation, not only in distinction from the church but in triumphant defiance of it. And although in such instances my experience would lead me to fear that the church is practically in error in regard to the specific matter in dispute, yet it may be doubted whether there has not been an earlier, a fundamental error, in the first constitution of the corps of teachers. For if it be formed, as in consistency with Independency and, may I not say, with ordinary prudence it should be formed, as an expression of the church's spirit, it can only be through peculiar mismanagement that the church and the teachers ever assume any but the most harmonious relations. Indeed, if churches were once generally constituted according to a catholic model, the teachers would be little other than the primary church-committee.

But I am not sure that there is not in some cases a still earlier error; the assumption, I mean, that a church needs a Sunday School at all. And where a school is established in what I would call an artificial way, rather than produced from the constraint of the church's actual circumstances; where, for example, it is formed

in order that the church's Christian philanthropy having this field for manifestation, the church itself may have more bands to hold it together, rather than in order that a field already possessed may be the most effectually tended, there, I apprehend, a Sunday School has all the dead weight of an adjunct, rather than the vigour of an off-shoot. I deny, now, altogether that it is a church's function to find sufficient, or, therefore, to find any Christian service for its members. Its function is to kindle and sustain the spirit for service, leaving every individual to determine his own labour, and to find the fit sphere for its exhibition. Just what I have said in regard to foreign missions, and to the objects of all associations for religious purposes, I would say specifically in regard to both the general and the Christian education of neglected youth; namely, it is a work for Christian men, but not necessarily for Christian churches. A Christian church, indeed, may find itself so situated, so many persons both young and old surrounding it, for whom specific instruction is desirable, and on whom no other machinery can act so favourably as its own, that a school, or that classes, or that a home-mission, or that a foreign mission, if only

the church can really superintend it, may hence arise; and this, I maintain, displays the only defensible theory of Sunday Schools in connexion with Independent churches. But far be it from the members of any church, in the ordinary circumstances of British society at present, to confine their cares for the youthful population of this kingdom, or for any class of the population, on either Sunday or any other day, to such efforts as churches can efficiently and can best conduct. Let people act in churches where they can thus act best, but let them also act separately if they please; (and, perhaps, if they do they will often accomplish the most good;) or let them unite with any Christian people, without respect to ecclesiastical relations, precisely as they can act for other philanthropic objects, securing such stated or such occasional assistance as they deem desirable and as is within their reach. Of course if a church be uncatholic, such conduct is almost prohibited; but on the supposition of a church's catholicity, such conduct is that which is the very best adapted to maintain and to diffuse this pure and primitive spirit.

But proceeding on the assumption that whatever Christian and philanthropic ends should be

sought by people who are members of a church, can be best sought in the churches whereof they are members, and, perhaps, adopting the principle that a church is under obligation to find fields of Christian usefulness for its members, many churches have thus involved themselves in such perplexities (I speak now of their Sunday Schools alone) as to be nearly at their wit's end. For they have felt compelled to add field to field, lest through the rivalry of other sects and other churches they should lose what they had enclosed; till the Day School has been added to the Sunday School, and, as I have before shown, large numbers of our churches have been brought thus into most infelicitous circumstances; while as many juvenile auxiliaries to religious societies as the church has auxiliaries of adults, have been added to the day schools; Sunday School libraries, and clothing clubs, and sick clubs, and funeral clubs, and book and magazine clubs to those; and, again, Bands of hope, and mutual improvement societies, and discussion classes, and peace societies, and excursion clubs, and I know not what; till at last the churches as such have become committed through their Sunday Schools, if not by more direct action, to political, to moral, to philanthropic, to economical, to lite-

rary, to recreative movements, which some members seriously disapprove and which many hesitate to praise, and to a few veritable abominations which almost all condemn, though they fear to give offence to the teachers by denouncing.

Meanwhile complaints arise from pastors that their ministry is counteracted or neglected, and from teachers that they labour without their pastors' and the churches' sympathy. Often, too, very difficult questions of authority spring up between the church and the teachers. And all the while, if we would but watch, we should observe a constant current towards us, and another from us, of grave, enlightened, and devout men, who are in search of a church, or who think that they or their children may soon be, but who, when they discover all that is thus done under the sanction of our churches, will not make themselves responsible for such measures. Were all that is thus done, done by men as members of general society, or as Christian individuals, the people of whom I speak, and all men fit for general society, if they could not approve, could tolerate it; but when expected to give it their tacit sanction, and more, so to act as tacitly to testify that it all has the sanction of the Lord Jesus, the head of every church,

they then meet with the one thing that they dare not tolerate, I mean intolerance. For they find that they cannot be tolerated at the Lord's table, or in general ecclesiastical communion, unless they will acquiesce in all these adjuncts : and they, therefore, take the only course that is now open to them ; that is, they turn away from those who would thus subjugate them.

It remains that I say a few words on the way in which our church-business is too frequently conducted, and on our prayer-meetings. And in regard to the former, it is notorious that not only our discussions are occasionally of so disorderly and unfriendly, not to say rude and coarse a character, as to deter people who love peace and gentleness from attending on them, but that often what passes as the decision of the church, if not unfairly attained, is yet only by a fiction the decision of the church at all. For in order to accommodate the poorer members, the hour chosen for business is usually one at which but a small proportion of the other members can attend. In case of adjournment, it often happens that members present at the first discussion are absent from the second and final one. The patience of not a few is wearied out, if not by the frivolousness of the matters in dispute, by

the loquacity of some speakers, and by a general disregard to that order that should pre-eminently characterize a church. Discussion, too, often arises concerning views of truth, and of personal propriety, with which no church ought to meddle. And thus it not unfrequently comes to pass that decisions are announced, and are carried out, with all the imposing authority denoted when they are described as the vote of the church, when it is well known to all who are concerned that this vote of the church is opposed to the real mind of the church, and is only the vote of that portion of the church, or of a small majority of that portion of the church, which was present at the final settlement. I refrain from the mention of extreme and extravagant instances of indecorum and faction; and I shall, therefore, add only, that the secrecy in which our church-meetings are generally conducted, is seldom defended in any other way than what resolves itself into a confession, that were the world, that is, people not church-members, present at them, they might suffer damage from the unseemliness that they would witness.

Yet the importance of the subject would, perhaps, justify a more ample treatment of it; although if what I have wished to advocate in

my former remarks may be considered as established, and may be supposed to be adopted, it will follow that not many, perhaps that very few, of the topics that usually occupy our churches at their meetings for business, ought ever to come before them; that these meetings need not be many; and that an amount of sense and self-government, and evident right and competency to give an opinion, will be secured for dealing with legitimate business, such as without distinct effort would effectually restrain the spirits of the more presuming and unruly in their proper situation. It might be well, also, if, in the conducting of the business, as much approximation as is possible in the circumstances of a church were always made to those modes of conducting business in other societies, which experience has formed and stamped as among the best guarantees of personal liberty, and the best protectives from individual frowardness. Perhaps, too, it might occasionally be found expedient to employ an hour of the Lord's day for the greater portion of the business that would occupy us; a season which to my own mind appears on many accounts the most eligible.

But it is in publicity, the fullest possible exposure of ourselves as Christ's churches to the

inspection of all who care to see how Christian men conduct themselves when gathered together in the name of the Lord Jesus for matters immediately connected with His honour; it is in publicity that I look for the most effectual preventive of all evil. For there is nothing more corrupting than the consciousness of acting as a privileged person, an ecclesiastical person for example; and there is nothing more preservative from temptations to evil, than the consciousness of exposure to the opinion of those who will have no respect to either real or imaginary privilege of ours, but will try our conduct in the light of universal truth, by the standard of simple justice, and with the boldness of acknowledged freemen. As I hinted in a previous lecture, I have more than once advised churches to insist upon their social right to meet without the presence of people who were not of them, when they had reason to believe that these people aimed at the destruction of their independence. I am not sure that in any circumstances, except those of exposure to legal persecution, I would ever again tender the same counsel. Certainly in all the ordinary conditions of churches in this land, publicity is essential to their Christian service. For it is Christ's

business, not their own, that they should transact; and He has given no warrant for the secrecy which but few court except the Independents, and which can be maintained by none without exposure to the suspicion, and much liability to fall into the reality, of corruption. I can make no exception, not even the case of a person proposed for excommunication; having no doubt at all that such a case would be more rare, and that when it occurred it would be much more suitably conducted, if publicity were the invariable condition of a church's meetings, than it is when churches meet to the exclusion of the general public. Nor should we forget that even the apostle Paul trusted to the presence of unbelievers in the church at Corinth for assisting to effect that all things should be done decently and in order.

But in speaking of publicity I feel that the topic has two aspects. It is the external aspect that I have now treated; but if what passes in the church should pass in public, I think that things relating to the church should be hardly settled anywhere but in the church. In the last lecture I stated that I should have occasion to bring forward another corrective, if any were needed, of the ambition of our richer members;

and this corrective is no less good for the ambition of either pastor or any other members, whether in office or out of office, and whether of one class of qualifications or of another. And it is simply, that whatever in the pastor's esteem, or in the esteem of the deacons, concerns the church in their two respective departments, should be introduced and concluded in the presence of the church, and should never be referred to any parties having the force of a secret committee, or of a committee at all, unless by the church's express desire.

If I might address myself to pastors in particular, I should speak much and earnestly on a matter on which they are the chief parties to whom appeal should be made. For when a man becomes a pastor, I maintain that he is the pastor of the whole church, and cannot lawfully keep back what he believes to be profitable to them. And if once he submits his thoughts and wishes to the review of either the financial officials, men who, almost it seems by necessity of office, are reluctant, and who at all events are proverbially reluctant, to undertake, or to recommend anything new, and by whose possible differences of opinion he may be even most painfully embarrassed ; if once, then, a pastor submits his con-

victions to the review of either the deacons, or other members of conspicuous station and great power, so that not his mind but another becomes the really presiding mind in the church, and much that he could like to say and to do is left unsaid and undone, from that hour I apprehend that the church becomes a mere tool, or a registrar of others' decisions ; and it cannot be surprising if the guide who has thus betrayed it, has at last the feelings, wears the aspect, and incurs the reputation, of an unhappy slave.

The only palliation of such a man's fault is the difficulty of his position ; the system in which he has undertaken to be a leader being in such a condition as to ensure the defeat, by what passes as the church, of many a measure that commends itself to both good sense and Christian feeling, unless the pastor resort to secret means for either overawing or outvoting the unenlightened and more disputative of his people. But better, far better, accept defeat than resort thus to secret measures. Defeat may be but temporary ; but from the hour of his reliance on the specific aid of individuals, rather than on the sense and feeling of a public body, a pastor is unduly subject to the opinion of the individuals, and is liable to all the consequences that I have noticed.

Open to his church, his church open to mankind, and his soul kept in childlike intercourse with God, a pastor may be free, dignified, just, impartial, happy. Confiding so in individuals as to become restrained towards his church, he can reasonably expect but the withdrawal of the church's confidence, the ultimate domination over himself of those whom he has trusted, and the rise of jealousies and animosities which, peradventure, will be finally appeased but in the sacrifice of the miserable pastor, their first though unintentional exciter.

I alluded, also, to the weekly prayer-meetings, as they are called, that are still expected as a matter of course in connexion with Independent churches. And though not prepared to deny their past utility even in the larger towns, or their present utility in many parts, I submit whether, in the ordinary circumstances of a church in a large town, the occasion for them is not terminated, and the continuance of them is not more hurtful than desirable. The distance of the people's habitations from the place of meeting; the late hour necessary for the meeting; changes in many social usages; the multiplication of other religious and philanthropic demands upon people's small amount of leisure;

the imperative obligation that more care rather than less should be given by us to the domestic sphere; the diminution from these causes in the number of those attendants who are both qualified and willing to lead in prayer; the lamentable consequences that occasionally follow manifested incompetency in this matter; the too frequent assumption of an air of superior spirituality by those who attend; the necessary effects of lax and irregular attendance on a minister's spirits, and preparation for his department of the service; the absolute compulsion on him, in the present circumstances of society, to devote but little time to such preparation; the natural effect of this on the pleasures of his audience; the absurdity of the supposition that, with all the other existent aids to spiritual and moral culture, any but the least educated can derive much good from a third discourse in a week by the same individual; these, with numerous inferior but not unimportant considerations, render it, perhaps, expedient that as a church-institution these meetings should be discontinued wherever the objections here enumerated to them are generally applicable.

But I hasten from a topic on which few, perhaps, can think for the first time without much

painful prejudice, on account of old associations ; and, indeed, I am here glad to close what most of my hearers have possibly regarded as a work of fell destruction. Yet they will perceive that, consistently with the demolition effected, I might have demolished even more. And on one topic, the pulpit, I have still somewhat in reserve ; although, as that topic furnishes a connecting link between the past and the future, or suggests the first new creation that should arise out of the awful chaos to which, I fear, you will have thought all things reduced by my revolutionary will, I leave it for the final lecture, to which I now very respectfully request your return.

LECTURE IV.

INDEPENDENCY AS IT MIGHT BE.

ALLOW me to recal the ground that I have taken in the preceding lectures.

I have maintained that there is a strong current of public opinion towards the principles which have ecclesiastical expression in Independency; and that as men inquire for a church-system according to whose general fabric they could re-model Ecclesiastical Institutions, they will desiderate such a one as Independency professes to be. For the required features are such Social Comprehensiveness, Scriptural Catholicity, Power of Self-perpetuation, and Independence of all other Institutions, as both the New Testament and the declarations of Independents ascribe to a Christian church.

In relation, then, to these *desiderata*, and to the principles of Independency as popularly expressed, I have animadverted on the following things that strike an investigator of Independ-

dency as it is : its formation of two such bodies as "the church," and "the congregation ;" its trust-deeds ; its pew-rents ; its entire financial system, and particularly the obscurity in which it is involved, and its treatment of chapel-debts, pastors' salaries, and church-pensioners ; its examinations of candidates for its fellowship ; its sectarianism ; its denominationalism ; its unions of churches, both the provincial and the national, and particularly the periodical publications of this last ; its ministerial associations ; its connexion with various societies, particularly societies for religious purposes ; much in the management of its Sunday Schools ; much also in its ordinary preparation and transaction of church-business ; and, finally, its persistence in what are called prayer-meetings, where the occasion for these has passed away.

Now I can imagine a thoroughly denominational man ready to exclaim, applying the language of the heart-broken idolater, Micah, to his own case, "Ye have taken away my gods, and what have I more ?" And I can imagine such a one declaring farther, that the chief evil in Independency as it is, its ministry, I have left altogether inviolate. Yet I have taken nothing from Independency but what in my own opinion

conceals, defiles, and weakens it ; and I cannot see that its existent supporters have any specific cause of reproach against its living ministry. Would we but make a fair exhibition of Independency without the adjuncts, and the consequences of the adjuncts, of which I have complained, I should expect a fabric very goodly to the eye, and very impressive on the spiritual nature by reason of the pervading glory of the presence of the Almighty. And when I am referred to the pastors of this generation of Independents as to the men who have shorn our church-system of its strength, and have, peradventure, corrupted its vitality, I answer, " We are but what the system has made us. We are no worse than ministers must needs be if nurtured in modern Independency, and expected, and under many a solemn obligation, to express its nature, and to fall in with its tendencies. Given the school, and we can predicate the general characteristics of the scholars. Given the parents, and we shall know much about the children. Given the soil and the culture, and we can foretel much respecting each particular crop."

I do utterly and earnestly deny that Independent pastors show much less of general, or any less of specific competency for their service, than

what distinguishes other Christian ministers, whether of this or of any land. Such as our system is, with all its faults, it can endure comparisons; and among its fruits its pastors need not shrink from the scrutiny that would examine them by the side of analogous productions of competing systems. I care not to assert more, though I believe more, and though I would maintain more before our enemies. But it is to presumed friends of Independency that I am now discoursing; and I pray them, in their dissatisfaction with its present aspects, not to point their reproaches and innuendoes at their ministers, as if man had had reason, or any right, to expect from us a much superior kind of service to that which we have rendered.

It is a momentous undertaking to become a Christian pastor: and if we pastors were not subjects of the same fatherly government, established by the grace of God in Christ, under which we teach our people to believe themselves, the defective exhibition by us of many a good principle, and the admixture of it, defective as it is, with a grievous amount of evil, would expose us to tremendous judgments. But should you censure us for a servile, timid, partial examination of the Scriptures, who will not receive us in

our youth into fellowship with yourselves, unless we be willing to acquiesce in your technically worded creed ; who esteem us in proportion to our dogmatic assertion of its articles ; who, in our early public prayers and addresses to young children and the poor, look suspiciously on whatever indicates a tendency to unsoundness in relation to your scholastic formularies ; who institute colleges for the preparation of pastors, distinguished by the same strict technical theology that pervades your churches ; who appoint professors whom you trust and whom you charge to encourage no tendency, but to repress every tendency among their pupils, to such views as cannot be compressed into your theologic system, and to all phraseology unsuitable thereto ; who, even before your committal of young men to the guidance of these tutors, examine them yourselves, and this often with the severest particularity, as to the cardinal items that you desire them to advocate ; who, perhaps, during their academical term, subject them to many another trial to the same effect ; and who, when at last you ask them to do their best in assisting you to understand the Scriptures, take for granted, and make or suffer them to feel that you take for granted, that their explanation of the

Scriptures shall be always according to your scholasticism, and that to justify this scholasticism, rather than to expound the Bible, is the great end of preaching ?

And should you taunt us with our moral cowardice in general life, and particularly with our shunning to declare our thoughts on any matter, and with our endeavouring to repress free speech among yourselves, if much in both our ecclesiastical nurture and our academical discipline has so conduced to the formation of a fearful, a wary, not to say a parasitical and a wily spirit, that only special grace, acting on a peculiar natural temperament, can be expected to counteract it; if our churches are constructed with such a constitution that the slightest difference of opinion in them often threatens their rupture ; and if all, or nearly all, the most painful consequences of a rupture are concentrated on the heart and the purse of the unhappy pastor ?

And should you complain of half studied and inappropriate sermons, who by your virtual junction of one institution or another to your churches, either multiply your pastors' duties till they have little time for preparation for the pulpit, and still less for caring for their own

house, or expose the church to the evil consequences of their declining to conduct those institutions, and themselves to various complaints of indifference to them, of seclusion and of indolence ?

And is it generous, is it fair, to accuse them of subservience to the rich, if but for the few who are called rich you would often allow them to suffer want more than they already, perhaps, suffer ; if they not seldom find that the views of the rich are broader, juster, kinder, as might be expected from the superior opportunities possessed by them to acquire comprehensive wisdom, than the views of those who both envy and fear them ; and if, but for their private acts of mediation, the rich and the sensible would be much more frequently even than they already are, so aggrieved by the rude personalities which under the name of faithfulness they encounter in our churches, but which beneath the appearance of conscious spiritual equality express the spirit of a levelling socialism, as either to discontinue their attendance on our meetings for business, or to secede altogether to ecclesiastical fellowships, or to domestic retirement, where their personal piety can be nurtured without either the giving or the receiving of offence ?

We might admire the man who, notwithstanding all the disadvantages to which I have alluded, should be a Scriptural preacher rather than a theological, a pastor to his church rather than a servant of the general Christian public, and a doer of all things without partiality and without guile, rather than one for whom we must continually frame excuses. But I think it romantic, unjust, and not honourable to God's spiritual providence, to expect this kind of pastor as the prime fruit of modern Independency. Even of those whose names are often cited as the best exemplars of the Independent pastor, and of those who have attained such pre-eminence among us that by reason of them Independency has been importantly elevated to its present position before the eye of the nation, it is surprising how many have been indebted for either their excellence or their eminence, or for both, to advantages external to our system, and not at all connected with it.

If you would review the names of our most regretted ministers who have died within the last quarter of a century, and of the most useful and the most eminent who are now living, you would find that excluding those who have been little, if at all indebted to Independency for

what has raised them to distinction, the remainder would appear bereft of a large measure of what now gives lustre to the whole. One class of the former enjoyed both domestic training and a general education among other sects, and owed no part, or a mere nominal part, of their ministerial preparation to Independency, or to what approximated Independency. Another class, bred and educated among Independents, were yet never pupils in any theological institution. Another class were either virtually expelled from some one of our colleges, or retained within its walls by special indulgence on account of their external relations, notwithstanding divers notorious irregularities; and a fourth class, having private property by means of which they could either conciliate or defy people who would otherwise have troubled them, have been thus enabled to enjoy an amount of personal and ministerial liberty to which many of their less favoured brethren have been strangers. And if occasionally through the mere force of general character pervaded with religion, a pastor altogether prepared according to modern Independency, and by means of its institutions, has triumphed over the obstacles obtruded by the system to which he has been indebted for many

advantages, no reasonable man will require that all other pastors shall conform themselves to his example, or will wish to continue such obstacles as I have described, in order that if possible they may be overcome.

Nothing said on this subject is more unjust than the complaints so full of emotion, not to say so distinctly tinctured with bitterness, that we hear on every hand throughout the country in relation to our ministers and our colleges. I should equally dislike specific complaints of the laity, could these complaints be pointed as personally as the others can, and if individual laymen had no power of relief beyond what is enjoyed by either tutors or pastors. Still, complaints directed exclusively against laymen would be, I believe, flagrantly unjust. It is the entire administration, if anything, that is faulty; and in such circumstances it ill becomes fellow-culprits to engage in the adjudication of their several demerits. And, particularly, I deplore the temper observable in many of the publications of what I have called the Democratic School of Reformers. Brethren, when they become self-constituted judges, should be especially careful both to feel and to express themselves as brethren, and as accomplices in the faults rebuked.

If Independents had misspent the national funds; or if they had spent their own money to the damage of their neighbours; or if any one of those offended with them had been compelled to prolong his pecuniary contributions beyond the time during which he received the equivalent for which he had stipulated; the tone of the public prosecutor might in any of these cases have been somewhat appropriate. But our faults, though instances of inconsistency with our own professions, have been committed by us with an almost perfect unanimity; they have been, at the worst, only such as have been shared by other sects, which have meanwhile done less general service; and if they have prevented Independents from accomplishing all the good that it was in their hearts to do, we have robbed no man, and have defrauded no man.

The errors of Independency, then, while well worthy of exposure, and while such that all genial efforts to expose them deserve Independents' candid and generous construction, are yet not the errors of men whom any one should regard, or should treat, as either his own enemies or the enemies of the nation, or of any class of people in the nation. In relation to the poor, for instance, (if I may revert for a minute

to this grave question, though to the suspension of the general argument,) in relation to the poor, then, I see little of the wisdom that cometh from above among those who arraign us in general, or our pastors in particular, as despisers of the poor; although I see in such conduct much of what appeals to the worst feelings of the more numerous classes of the population, and tends to generate among them that which Greek, Roman, British, and universal history, each attests to be the most pernicious spirit that can characterize a people. For there is not a more corrupting spirit than that which will take favours, I speak not now of alms or of bounties, but of well-meant, co-operative, neighbourly, brotherly favours, as a debt, or as an instalment of a debt, and that, denying the favour, will either return insult and bravado, under the name of liberty, for that which nevertheless it receives, or stealthily employ what it receives for the paralyzing of the hand that yields it. A church may be a democracy; at all events I shall not dispute it now, though I could not accept this description without qualification. But when it is so called by declaimers who maintain that the poor are despised and injured by us, and who appeal thus to the peculiar sympathies of the

so-called labouring classes, they force us to recal the fate of all democracies wherein such declamation has been current, and to inquire also whether theirs is the kind of gospel that in the beginning was preached to the poor.

Yet that modern Independency has wrought in many ways to the disadvantage of the poor is, I think, undeniable; and I endeavoured to exhibit this in a preceding lecture. But instead of the spirit pervading either our churches or our pastors being a spirit that disdains poor people, and has no consideration for their feelings, I believe it to have been a spirit that has assisted to mislead them by unnecessary courtesies and caresses into a false and very unhappy position. There may have been mistakes in both our pew-rent system and our scholastic treatment of divine things; and through these, in part, the adults of the poorer classes may have been repelled from our churches. But such repelling influence has not been confined to the Independents, and it has scarcely, if at all, affected either the instruction of labourers' children, or the efforts of the town-missionaries. Often meanwhile we have courted the attendance of the poor among us in a manner ill adapted to produce conviction of our catholicity; we have so re-

lieved their temporal wants, and so supplied their spiritual, as to nourish to a great extent a spirit of dependence; we have so descanted on their spiritual and ecclesiastical equality as to leave moral rights and social proprieties too much in the back-ground, and to prepare them insufficiently for the use of the privileges that we have thus paraded; we have so deferred to them as to keep at a distance from us many of those without whose help we can do little for the poor, and who see the distant evil consequences to general society of such well-meant but flattering deference; and, lastly, when it is complained of our pastors that they have not publicly attacked the peculiar faults of the rich, it is forgotten to how much greater an extent they have refrained from animadverting on the peculiar faults of the poor.

In the effects of Independency on the more numerous classes of the people I see, therefore, what reflects dishonourably in two ways on the general administration of our church-system, though not at all specifically on our pastors. For while our pew-rent customs render it impossible for more than a few of those classes to worship with us to their personal comfort, some of our other customs tend to the production of false

views of things among the few whom we have gained. But in neither of these points, and, indeed, in no point which excites lamentations over Independency, is there any cause for arousing the church against the pastor or the pastor against the church, the rich against the poor or the poor against the rich. Our fathers before us adopted a few evils together with much good, and we have added to the number; all of us inconsiderately and unconsciously accumulating weights on Independency, till at last, in the esteem of many, it can progress no farther, even if it can stand.

While thus speaking, however, I have not the least desire to conceal what I believe to be a fact, that the character and the ministrations of our pastors are much affected for the worse by the general operations of our system: I only wish that as the children, not the creators of the system, we should suffer no more than a correspondent share of censure, and that much improvement in us should not be expected while the operations of the system are unaltered for the better. I have already admitted the fact, and I have, I think, accounted for it, of occasional instances of pastors' marked superiority to our ill administered polity: but although some men

are thus specially enabled to be better than their system as thus administered, it is hardly righteous to expect the like superiority in its mere representatives. Nor is it wise to limit our desires to a reformed ministry, unless it can be shown that this may be produced from an unrefomed Independency. For the men who are proposed as models to us, have been often, I think mostly, men indebted for their pre-eminence to other nurture than that of Independency, or to special personal conditions which have counteracted our evil operations, and in despite of these have wrought for our advantage.

We concede, however, that, wherever the fault lies, there is a large amount of truth in many common allegations, such as those to which I shall now give prominence; using, according to my wont, much, perhaps extreme, boldness of expression, as accounting it better that I myself should be evil spoken of than that what is whispered by others to our dishonour should be reported by me to no good purpose.

First, then, it is said that our preaching is the advocacy of a creed, or the ingenious multiplication of suggestions from the mere words of a text, or the diluted exhibition of a not very practical spiritual sentiment, rather than the

exposition of the Scriptures, a display of God's accomplishment of His eternal covenant through all ages, a demonstration of His oneness in physics, ethics and redemption, and a vigorous application of the truths thus elicited to the conscience and the heart of man in all social circumstances, and whatever be his moral and spiritual condition. Accordingly, we limit faith to one view of things divine, or even to one view of the central object in the revelation, rather than exhibit it as the mind's apprehension of things as revealed to it by God, and its action upon each of these in turn. We speak of morality either under the forbidding aspect of laws whose sole utility is to compel us to believe on Christ, or under the not much more attractive aspect of rules whose chief obligation results from our faith in Jesus, and which practically are little other than ecclesiastical bye-laws, rather than as expressions of the Divine nature and will concerning the spiritual health of man in all conceivable circumstances, both in unbelief and in faith, and both in time and in eternity. We contract and distort the gospel by such representations as do far less than proportional justice to the good news of redemption from the power of earth, of man, and of the devil. We

labour for such excitement of a few specific spiritual affections, as prevents the symmetrical development of the whole spiritual nature; over-elucidating the particular to the neglect of the general; and consequently forbearing to apply the redeeming energy of the gospel to the soul of man in those associations, and in those experiences, in which it is the will of God that it should spend the chief part of its time on earth. And in like manner we attach more importance to the ecclesiastical relations than to the wider Christian and social relations; as if aiming to form Christians whose sympathies shall be confined to their churches, or expressed only through their medium, rather than extended freely to all spiritual character, and to man's common nature.

Secondly, it is said of our public prayers that they, too, grievously misapply the Scriptures, betray ignorance of men's present wants and spiritual sins, and both exaggerate two or three forms of the spiritual life, and contract men's general conceptions of faith, piety, love, and righteousness: also that they are often chargeable with a sameness that has all the faults without the excellences of a liturgy: moreover, that even in them a dread of theological criticism and an ultra-ecclesiastical bias are both

manifest: and, too, that the didactic towards man takes frequently the place of Divine adoration, and the accusatory against man the place of common prayer and supplication.

Then, thirdly, we hear on every hand that, now from fear of offending individuals, and now from fear of violating ecclesiastical arrangements or proprieties, we both keep back some things profitable for our people, and either openly concur in, or tacitly connive at, great injuries to men not members of our denomination, and great sins against Him who hath no respect of persons.

We meet, too, with complaints of our assumption of an aspect of superior holiness to the holiness possessed by other men, though we endure the ordinary trials of moral principle no better than other men. Our goodness in general is thus exposed to the charge of professional singularity, as being either limited to our more public services, or such as requires very peculiar conditions of living; whereas it should rather be exemplary of the same Christian virtues that we desire our people to cultivate, and that are of good report among all men. We are often charged with even those social improprieties, not to use a stronger appellation, which, though we

may call some of them fidelity, and others of them sympathy, are yet described by other men in the very language that we familiarly apply to much in the conduct of the clergy of the Church of Rome.

But I shall believe, till forbidden to believe, that my audience have no desire for me to expand this topic, now that they see me aware of both its comprehensiveness and its importance, and ready to acknowledge that there is such an amount of truth in these allegations as demands corrective measures both prompt and thorough. The conclusion that I draw is this, however; not that the pulpit should be reformed under the present administration of Independency, but that its effectual reform will be a consequence, and one of the most significant evidences, of the rise of a spirit among us that desires the improved administration of our system. For I see not how it is possible, according to the traditional practices of modern Independency, for the pastorate among us to become generally what we could wish. The faults in us ministers that give offence, are almost the necessary consequences of our circumstances. You choose, you educate, you establish your ministers; is it not likely, then, that if our failure be so

general as to attract observation, the error has been in your selection of probationers, in the education that you have given to them, and in the constitution of that position which you desire them to occupy? We are ignorant of life, you say; that is, of the circumstances and the trials in which it is the will of God that the human family should be placed. Then, too, we are not practical men, but expectants of impossibilities; not comprehensive men, but narrow; not men of general views, but of professional; not social men, but ecclesiastical; priestly men, not men who will meet their fellow-men as equals; men of mystery, and form, and pretension, not ingenuous, artless, and transparent; cowardly also, and not brave; slaves to public opinion, rather than its formers; and, in a word, among the most dependent of all men on the sympathy and support of others, though occupying the position of exemplars to the Independent churches.

Yet your selection of youths for your future pastors, and your sons', is generally of those who are distinguished for the gentler and quieter, rather than for the more robust and active social virtues, and for mystical and pseudo-spiritual, rather than for spiritually moralized

views of the Christian life. Among the best that you select are some in whom the taste for general literature is too highly cultured, and of too much power over the general habitudes, to allow the mind's full vigour to be expended in the field of the pastorate. And among the worst there are many whom no principle so strong as one of the meanest forms of a worldly and debasing ambition has stimulated to desire the office of a bishop ; these being men who had everything to gain and nothing to lose by accepting your aid to prepare them for the bishop's office ; while of the advantages conferred upon them, they were neither competent nor desirous to avail themselves farther than to gain opportunity and power to become "some great ones," if not in the more conspicuous circles of Independents, yet in circles in which they might find the ministry profitable unto the life that now is.

All these, now, together with others more eligible, you subject to a course of education whose general and whose professional departments are both usually conducted apart from young men preparing for different engagements, or for similar engagements among other sects ; thus excluding at once, expansive influences from the mind,

catholicizing influences from the heart, and the ordinary probationary influences of society from the whole character. The domestic or collegiate discipline under which you place these students, a discipline domestic rather than collegiate, and collegiate rather than civic, tends, too, more to repress than to allow spontaneous phenomena, and to punish errors rather than to excite internal and corrective vital power. The spirit of a clerical order, also, is thus generated ; if not of evil omen towards other sects, yet assuredly towards the laity of its own sect. And as the benefits conferred upon the subjects of this training are usually costly, the donors granting them, and the receivers taking them, avowedly or by implication, for the support of Independence as it is, it seems the extreme of unreasonableness that chosen, educated, and pledged for the support of a pretty definite system, we should be expected to be forward in the revolutionizing of it ; especially when in the great majority of cases we must be more than men if we can act as freely as others whose education for public life has cost the denomination nothing ; and still more especially when from our completed academical curriculum we pass into the pastor's chair to oversee a church in which con-

servatism is supposed to be the chief characteristic of vitality.

I return, then, to the point from which I started, and maintain that instead of the long popular cry, "A reformed ministry the hope of the churches!" we should rather appropriate a still older oracle, and say, "Either make the tree good and his fruit good, or else make the tree corrupt and his fruit corrupt; for the tree is known by his fruit."

There are some, indeed, who would supersede the pulpit altogether; meaning by "the pulpit," the employment of a single pastor, or even of more than one, engaged to devote his whole time and powers; viewed comprehensively, to the church's edification, supported for the purpose, and entrusted with the entire conduct of the worship and of the social study of spiritual things. But I doubt if the country is prepared thus to supersede the pulpit; or, indeed, if it will ever be, according to the present visible tendencies of general society. The proposal to supersede it is no novelty. The attempt has been often made in both North Britain and South; but when subjected to exhaustive tests it has always failed. Were it now generally made, it would be, I believe, the fatal step to

the extinction of Independency as an ecclesiastical system ; naturally leading to the denial of the desirableness of churches of any kind.

Even to this last plunge no few of our people have of late felt tempted ; and considering the hopelessness of much reform in existent churches, I cannot greatly wonder. I should even have admired and praised, if in several instances within my knowledge recourse had been had to a primitive practice, that of the formation of a church in a private house ; sometimes with, sometimes without, the services of a hired pastor.* But from the total abnegation of churches I recoil. They express, I think, and supply, a natural want of men as at once religious and social. In some form I trace them from the earliest ages. I have little doubt of their virtual existence among the Hebrews, as

* While revising this passage for the press, I received from a gentleman of extraordinary mental vigour and of rare moral excellence, a letter in which he inquires, "What shall a man do who cannot be a churchman, and who would, but cannot, be a satisfied dissenter? I have now representatives of four classes of men in view, (all at present members of Independent churches,) who would prefer not to be, and who, perhaps, with their views and in their peculiarity of position, ought not to be, the usual full members of our churches as these are at present constituted."

a spontaneous growth, a singularly voluntary church-constitution, in addition to, while in distinction from, their associations for typical worship, long before the close of the regal era, if not from the very first settlement of the people in Palestine. The existence of such synagogues among the later Jews is denied by no one ; and that when apostles formed churches they concurred in, or obeyed, a divine dictate given through man's common nature, rather than established special positive institutions by express revelation, this, too, I suppose, will be generally acknowledged.

The need and the desirableness of churches granted, I doubt, then, if in men's general circumstances, whether the present or the probable future, we can dispense with a pastorate scarcely distinguishable in form from that with which we are familiar. For the fulness of the Bible is as yet but little appreciated by the people of this nation ; nor do I think that it ever can be, unless as it is expanded before them by systematic and regular labours. In the rising demands and requirements of a nation such as this, I believe, indeed, that few men will have time or power for more than the suitable preparation of two discourses weekly, allowing for occasional in-

crease and for occasional relaxation of labour, in addition to the more private services of the pastorate. But on the other hand I have not the slightest apprehension that a vigorous and well-furnished mind, devoting itself to the one central work of developing the contents and illuminating the significance of the Scriptures, will ever feel that materials fail for the edification of a church when, I say not all sorts of audiences, or any number of successive audiences, but the church, viewed collectively, may find it desirable or possible to avail itself of his endeavours to instruct it. There may be occasions, too, in which a plurality of pastors, even while no one of them is yet past his prime, may be very advantageous; permitting the multiplication of services, and the adaptation of some to the specific wants of the young and of other classes. It is no part of my present duty to plead for such plurality. But I should be sorry to be regarded as not favourable to it where it is practicable, or as assuming that the experiment had been sufficiently tried in modern times.

If, too, it should be thought by any that a printed liturgy, perhaps not the same continually, but one of twelve or twenty liturgies, or that, if not a printed liturgy, prayers written

and read by the pastor, either of these permitting the occasional addition of extemporaneous worship; if, I say, it should be thought that any of these modes might be a desirable substitute for our present modes, I know nothing in Independency that should prevent its adoption. Indeed to me it is a striking fact, that many of the ministers whose public prayers approach the nearest to what public prayers should be, are among the most earnest advisers that we re-consider the desirableness of liturgies; such is their conception of the importance of suitable public prayers, such their experience of the exhausting requirements of these prayers if extemporaneous, and such their dread of allowing a church's worship to depend upon the variations in either the spiritual or the physical condition of an individual.* It does not follow, you will ob-

* It appears to me to be defensible by no considerations, that the guiding and the sustaining of a church's devotional desires and feelings should be made to depend upon a minister's freedom from headache, or his firmness of nerve amidst daily vicissitudes; or even upon the health of his spiritual feelings, and the constancy of his power to take those comprehensive views which are essential to an assembly's "common prayer." I doubt if the objections to liturgies are so strong as the objections thus suggested to the uniform offering of extemporary prayer in a church by a single minister. Since the delivery of the lec-

serve, that the use of a liturgy will involve the church's audible responses, far less its alternate reading of either prayers or the Scriptures with the minister. To all this, with the exception of an expression of simple assent, there are specific objections; particularly the isolation of the minister as the offerer of some prayers, and of the church as the offerer of other. But both instrumental and vocal music might, perhaps, be more extensively used among us in the midst of the brief prayers practicable in a liturgy; though it may be doubted whether it would ever be possible to divide extemporaneous prayer better than we usually do at present, or so as to admit intervals more or longer for music, without either great irregularity or the thorough discomposure of the pastor's mind.

But while ready to allow that the duties of the pastorate might thus be beneficially modified in consequence of either a plurality of pastors or the adoption of a liturgy, I have no expectation of a time, at least according to the present tendencies of things, at which either Christ, in tures, the publication of *The Biblical Liturgy*, by the Rev. David Thomas, and of *A Chapter on Liturgies*, by the Rev. C. W. Baird, with *Preface* and *Appendix* by the Rev. Thomas Binney, has assisted to direct Dissenters' attention more pointedly and more wisely to the subject.

the support and the extension of His kingdom, will dispense with churches, or churches will dispense with such pastoral services as require pecuniary remuneration. There is sufficient authority in the New Testament, if any be needed, for such a ministry: and as on the one hand it becomes more generally evident that the exposition and the application of the Bible constitute a work for which no man is too great, while on the other hand, in proportion to their general culture, people are becoming more earnestly desirous of the assistance of the most competent guides to the right appreciation of the Scriptures, and more deeply convinced of the importance of an efficient ministry for the purpose, there seems no probability that the pulpit as we now have it, will ever, or at least will soon, be generally disused. Its power, I apprehend, will rather rise together with a nation's capability of estimating it aright, of discerning between good and evil, of separating between chaff and wheat, of knowing when they are well served, and of aspiring to discharge all the functions of the present life as those whose habitual scope comprises the things which are unseen and eternal.

But between the pulpit as it should be and

the present operations of Independency, there seems to me an utter and an irreconcilable incongruity. I cannot conceive that many young men, if thoroughly acquainted with existing Independency, and possessed of the characteristics, and animated by the motives, that we should desire in our future ministers, would enter the pastorate among us in the ordinary modes, unless, indeed, assured by means of peculiarities in their circumstances, of such personal freedom and independence as no sect or denomination has ever yet, perhaps, allowed. And it seems to me a very significant and an inauspicious omen, that while other honourable but ill-recompensed employments often attract our wealthier young men of Christian principle, and while the Romish and the English churches are neither of them without young, rich, and holy devotees, whose course shows that neither wealth nor power is their aim, but simply the doing of good according to their light, the pastorate among the Independents, if not despised, is yet refused as a sphere of honourable action by almost all of our more favoured scions. This surely could not be, our fundamental principles and, I will say, our spiritual life and power being what they are, but for such men's almost instinctive apprehension,

or their actual observation, of a something in the position of our pastors that they deem unsound, and disreputable to men who, like themselves, are of social circles and of pleasant companionships beyond the narrow limits of our sectarian churches. And though it may be thought that the attainment of great pulpit-power by such young men would enable them to do all honour to an Independent pastor's position, and ultimately to enfranchise both their own church and many another, yet the occasional instances that we have known of the results of acknowledged pulpit-greatness, are insufficient evidence to support the thought.

For that such greatness has been tolerated rather than appreciated by the churches that have enjoyed it, has been proved by their retention of practical evils opposed to the pervading spirit of the ministry, and often, after the cessation of the ministry, by such measures as seemed to reflect censure on whatever in it had been stimulative and catholic. The wonder, indeed, has been to many, that such ministers have been able to remain Independent pastors; and that when they have at last felt it to be beyond their power to conduct the church-business according to the principles advocated and the sentiments

breathed in the pulpit, they have not renounced their position in despair and melancholy. Sincerely desirous and singularly able to elicit the mind of the Holy Ghost in the Scriptures; candid and courteous when feeling themselves called upon to deal with opinions different from their own; apt and delighted to announce sublime and comprehensive principles of Christian union; of almost unerring intuition in the discerning of spiritual life; of sympathies the quickest and most intimate; of tastes simple and pure; of sensibility the most lively to the decorous, and to the opposite; and of a sense of justice that felt crucified when wrong was done to any man, and that felt crucified amidst darkness and horrors when the wrong was done by Jehovah's Israel, and was done, too, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ; how have such men been able, is it asked, to bear the contrast between a church as exhibited by them in the pulpit, and the church with which they afterwards met for the transaction of church-business; between the things in which they gloried in the pulpit, and the things that they afterwards appeared to sanction in the chair; between that which strangers who had listened to their preaching, as if before the curtain, might suppose Independency to be, and

that which they themselves who lived behind the scenes had found it; how, is it asked, have such men been able to bear the contrast, and to live on while still compelled to make it, rather than renounce a position so evidently false, and to themselves so cruelly dishonourable?

I will reply. They have not all *lived* thus. It has killed many of them; it has made some mad; and it is killing others. Of these ill-requited men, numbers have been so enslaved by the system to the last, as to deem that on no consideration ought they to expose it. Others, remembering the evil consequences to themselves of early impetuosity, have endured the discipline with something of the feelings of a lowly hermit in his penance. Others, perhaps, have against hope hoped that by patient perseverance in well-doing, so long as their free pulpit-speech if not welcomed was yet tolerated, they might secure a goodly measure of the prosperity that they desired for Zion. Many have sought personal independence in our colonies. Others have been glad of opportunities to forsake the pastorate for the professor's chair, for literary engagements, for private life. Some of the more independent spirits, if not of the more comprehensive and the farther-seeing, have entered the ministry of the

Church of England. Hundreds are writhing in their bondage, suffering as much as any clergymen from the yoke to which they once willingly submitted:—of whose end one fears to think. And although some few, either from mere but extraordinary force of character, or from the concurrence also of favourable circumstances, have to a large extent improved the constitution and the operations of their churches, yet not only are they, perhaps, solicitous concerning the labour which they have taken under the sun, because they know not whether the men that shall be after them, and that shall rule over all their labour wherein they have laboured, shall be wise men or shall be fools, but their number is as yet too low, and the general regards of their brethren towards them are too ungenial, for their conduct at present to be uplifted as an authoritative precedent, or as more than a not very alluring encouragement to imitate them.

Yet, as I intimated at the close of the last lecture, it is especially from the ministers, since they personally suffer most from what is evil in our system, that the first movements, not to reform the ministry irrespective of the system, but in favour of a general reformation, must naturally be expected. They may not, indeed,

act in concert; and in many particular cases their people may anticipate them. But as the degree of reforming energy that exists, has chiefly originated in some among them, so there is no reason to believe that ministers will not be found for the leadership of as many people as will follow them in the task of re-construction. A formal re-organization of existing churches, I beg to repeat, can hardly be expected, unless in rare conjunctures. But as the discussion of such matters as I have introduced in these lectures becomes full and public, one amelioration after another within the limits of the trust-deeds will be quietly conducted in our churches; and as recent legislative enactments render it less dangerous than it once was for a church even to violate its trust-deeds, it is possible that respect for these will become gradually less, till our churches shall be pervaded with a freer spirit, and this in harmony with both the New Testament and the law of the land.*

* The reference is to a recent Act of Parliament, by which churches that can be proved to have maintained any creed and discipline in a place of public worship, without interruption and without protest, for twenty years, are allowed to retain the premises and other endowments, although that creed and discipline be opposed to the provisions of the trust-deed. I approve that act, according to the design of its framers. For it

Meanwhile many a new church will be constituted on pure Independent and Catholic principles, serving for a model to both our older churches and the other denominations that may feel obliged to recombine their various elements. The formal adoption by these last of any known type of Independency, and especially of its name, must, perhaps, be resigned as hopeless, even if desirable. Their attainment of the reality, of both the spirit and the aspect, seems to be certain, however, will we but exhibit to them its advantages ; unless, indeed,—which may God avert!—some of those catastrophes that drive nations back towards barbarism, should subject both our public worship and our civil liberties to the will of an autocrat.

meets the case of churches which in ignorance or inadvertence have deviated from the prescriptions of their trust-deeds, and have meanwhile expended so much money on the premises as to have an equitable claim upon them beyond what any other individuals can prefer. If, too, all the parties who have an interest in church-property shall at any period concur in a proposed change of creed or of discipline, they seem thus to be permitted to effect the change. Yet, surely, neither this Act nor any moral principle gives sanction to either an individual man or a group of men who, in the hope of securing other men's property for their own purposes, may stealthily endeavour to introduce changes that they know to be in violation of a trust-deed.

And, perhaps, the gradual but diversified assimilation of the churches of other denominations, together with that of the Independent churches, to one general scriptural idea, is a process much more to be desired than the nominal conversion of thousands of congregations to Independency, with their formal re-construction according to one Independent model. Indeed, a scriptural Independency is hardly, perhaps, attainable as a general characteristic of the churches in a nation, without both wide diversities among them, and prevailing tendencies in all to adapt their operations to the ever-changing complexion and habits of general society around them. In proceeding, therefore, to represent the practicability of pure Independency, I deprecate the thought that I ought to describe the minuter features, or even the definite outlines, of a church for close imitation in all localities and through all generations. My wish is only to show that a church could exist, and could fulfil all the primitive functions of a church, though adopting none of the peculiarities which I have exposed as objectionable, and the discontinuance of which may appear to some like the extinction of Independency.

Yet I have opposed no principle that existed

in apostolic times; and no institution but such as either, though a modern application of an old principle, is already obsolete, or embodies a principle not adopted by apostles. It ought not, then, to appear questionable, whether it is possible for a church to exist, that desires to do honour to every apostolic principle, to exemplify each such principle in operations and usages adapted to social changes, and to adopt no principle whatsoever but what was illustrated by apostles. I might content myself, therefore, with saying, at least to Independents with their professions, that in this case, reversing the ordinary axiom, to construct is more easy than to destroy: the builder having nothing to do but to conform to what he himself acknowledges to be a complete idea before him in the Scriptures, while the destroyer has to convince men that much of their labour has been mis-spent. Yet while maintaining my title to assume that a simply Scriptural church is practicable, that is, that the idea of one is not romantic or extravagant, and that if men please to institute one their work will have the aspect of a reasonable service, it will tend to the completeness of these lectures, and form a suitable conclusion to them, if, having sketched the rise and progress of a

modern Independent church, I also represent how a purer Independency may be exemplified. Suggestions respecting many minute details may be gathered from preceding remarks that I need not repeat; my present object being rather to exhibit such a framework as, if approved, would easily admit an appropriate complement.

And I shall suppose confidence in each others' repentance towards God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ to be, as it is, I think, according to the Scriptures, the bond of the ecclesiastical, even as it is of all spiritual fellowship; this confidence arising not at all from the adoption in common of a system of theology, but mainly from the declaration of the individuals who propose to constitute the church, and the spirit that appears to animate them in the proposal, in the absence of all evidence indicative of either their hypocrisy or their ignorance of what they are doing. But when I thus speak of a profession of repentance and faith as the great scriptural profession that entitles men to Christian recognition, it should not be supposed that I wish to substitute one form of words for another. A man's general character of mind and heart, if he be not a dissembler against whom all forms would be useless, can be scarcely misapprehended when he ex-

presses his desire for ecclesiastical communion with Christian people, although he never use the words, "repentance," "faith," or any equivalent expressions. Indeed, if a man describe his personal religion at all, you can judge better of his spiritual aptitudes and sensibilities from his mere exhibition of the great objects in whose awful presence he lives, that is, of the facts which constitute the first stratum on which his faith depends, than from any account that he may give you of the relations that he thinks are among these objects, or of the effects of these objects on his emotions. Let a man, for instance, repeat that grand, that awful summary, which is commonly called the Apostles' Creed, a summary too profanely used by some, even as it is too flippantly contemned by others; let him, I say, repeat that summary, or the like; and although it propounds not a single doctrine, neither expresses a single emotion, yet, if he be not a dissembler, the general character of his spirit can hardly be misapprehended. As the faith is, so is the man; and he who can seriously profess *belief* in the dread objects or facts enumerated in that creed, believes enough, and comes under obligation enough, to make him as good a man as any man who hears him,

or hears of him, if, at least, faith has any sanctifying power.

And from such a broad Scriptural profession of Christian discipleship, made either explicitly or virtually, I would strenuously urge men when first constituting a church, or when entering one already formed, not to descend into formal doctrinal particulars. No such particularisation would have been made for the sake of mutual confidence as *spiritual* brethren and fellow-disciples, had no church ever existed. The general profession of faith in Christ would then have been sufficient for the establishment of reciprocal respect and kindness as Christians; and this profession, too, would have frequently, perhaps mostly, been less a profession in terms, than such as in analogous cases in general society soon introduces men of similar politics, scientific pursuits, or philanthropic cares, to one another's sympathy and co-operation. If, however, this be sufficient for spiritual fellowship, it surely ought to be for ecclesiastical. In short, for a confidence based chiefly, or to a large and perceptible extent, on avowed community in creed, I would substitute a confidence based on a man's apparent ruling tendencies, inclinations, and either incipient or ripened

sympathies ; confidence in personal character on a general profession of faith in Christ, taking the place of confidence in statements of dogmas and accounts of spiritual experience. Each of these bases may include somewhat of the other ; but they are sufficiently distinct to be popularly described as, the one, Manifest general character guaranteeing the soundness of a general Christian profession, and the other, Statements of things invisibly believed, and of experience invisibly felt, apparently so correct as to guarantee the general character.

The former of these, now, not the latter, is the basis, confidence in which constitutes the true bond, I apprehend, of ecclesiastical union. And assuming this, I proceed to remark that the object of such union is spiritual and Christian edification in common ; beyond which I know no other. Opportunities, indeed, may arise for the specific instruction in divine things, so far as a church's cares can reach, of many, both old and young, who either repair to its assemblies for the purpose, or are visited elsewhere by the church's agents. I showed in the last lecture, that a pure Independency, if it does not necessitate such measures in all cases, yet permits them in as many as ensure that the church

itself shall superintend the machinery for which it is responsible, and shall not by means thereof prevent the rise and action of machinery more general, and less likely to become selfish, sectarian, and thus worldly. But I again beg particular attention to the broad distinction between Christians' objects and obligations, and church-members'; for the two are neither commensurate nor identical. Altogether irrespective of church-fellowship, and just as if no churches had ever been formed, it is Christian people's duty to nourish themselves with the words of eternal life, to diffuse divine truth, to do good unto all men, to do good especially to such as are of the household of faith, to love these as brethren, and to be pitiful and courteous. United in a church they, of course, surrender none of these objects, and lose none of these obligations; they only pursue some of them by special measures, and at once become better acquainted with a few opportunities for the pursuit of others, and seek to be better qualified for the general pursuit of them all.

The question is, "What are the objects which Christians unite in a church to pursue by special measures?" My own opinion limits them to personal edification; in the pursuit of which,

indeed, they may show forth Christ to the world, and they may become acquainted as they would not otherwise have been with brethren whom they can provoke to love and to good works, with poor whom they can relieve, with inquirers whom they can instruct, and with many for whom, whether young or old, they can care more wisely than any other people can. But I know nothing in the Scriptures that represents works like these as specifically ecclesiastical. They can often be much better performed quite irrespectively of ecclesiastical relations. If at times a church acquires opportunities to act in these respects as a body, so, too, it often discovers opportunities for Christian service which either individuals or other institutions can best discharge. And inasmuch as a church's engaging in works of this description is singularly susceptible of abuse, becoming a preventive of more comprehensive and Catholic movements, and also an occasion for many members to feel themselves discharged from personal responsibility, and for much unholy rivalry and animosity between churches, I would hence earnestly advise men when forming themselves into a church, to regard their spiritual edification to God's glory as their one specific ecclesiastical object ; treating

the diffusion of Christian truth, and the promotion of other humane and godly ends, by means of church-machinery, as altogether occasional, and, if adopted, perhaps temporary service. If, meanwhile, their spiritual culture is Scripturally conducted in the church, not only will it be elsewhere promoted by them, but among its fruits will be found both much individual effort to glorify Christ by good works for necessary uses, and a readiness to follow the general laws of association with any Christians for such purposes as neither individuals can accomplish for want of strength, nor churches without risk of sectarianism.

The next point that demands notice is the terms of the legal deed by which our imagined church shall secure to itself, on the payment of pecuniary dues, the use of such property as it deems requisite for its objects. And the property might be invested for the use of the first constituents of the church, or of some of them, who should be mentioned by name, and of such other parties as they might associate with them in their discharge of the functions of a church of Christ. According to the supposed constitution, which respects personal character rather than community of particulars in a creed, what-

ever regulations the church might afterwards adopt in its use of the property would then be variable, and not permanently obligatory; and its later success would depend simply upon the Divine blessing on the freely formed character and services of the church for the time being.

But I should see no objection to a reference in a trust-deed to some public document containing a statement acknowledged by the church at its first formation to be a summary of its prevalent views respecting doctrine, order, and discipline; or to the including of such a statement in the deed itself; provided only that no member, present or future, should be accounted under obligation to hold those views, and that room should be allowed for the church at a future day to record a then prevalent variation from them. Reference to such a document, or the enclosure of such a statement in the trust-deed, might even prove of much historical value, as well as be at the first a slight public indication of the church's worthiness of general respect as a church of Christ.

In the selection of a pastor, too, I should advise that the same spirit should be shown as in the determination of the basis and the bond of union, and in the provision for the legal

security of the property ; the spirit, I mean, that respects men's visible character and qualifications, rather than the formal creed to which they may adhere. The chief point for solicitude, then, should be, not the system which a man will support from the Bible, but his power to exhibit the contents and the significance of the Bible ; the intelligence, the care, the gravity, the modesty, the candour, with which he will examine, and induce others to examine, the medium through which only the nature and the will of God towards sinful men are ascertainable ; the sympathy at once with God and with man that is betokened by his prayers ; and his free exemplification of a Scriptural and spiritual morality.

It matters little to the flock fed by such a man, whether the majority of them, or whether any individual among them, concurs or not in the doctrinal tendencies that he exhibits. Not undertaking to form their creed, but to lead them to such exercises as shall strengthen faith, enliven piety, and either put it in their power to form a creed for themselves, or so enlarge their views of the things of God that these shall appear too mysteriously vast to be defined by human language, this will be a kind of man from whose ministrations those who differ from

him in respect of some of his leanings, or his conclusions, will yet derive more advantage than from a ministration of positive dogmas, especially if urged in a dogmatic spirit, and vindicated by continual bravado. Reversing the trite maxim, "Not who or what manner of man says it, but what is said," a maxim suitable enough for the purpose of defending demonstrated truth without respect of persons, we, whose function is rather that of learners in the school of the Scriptures than that of asserters of final conclusions, and who can regard a pastor but as a fellow-learner possessed of a few peculiar advantages, should say rather, when inquiring for an exemplar in the art of learning of Christ, "Not what is said, but who and what manner of man says it."*

Eschewing unnecessary detail, I would yet urge, in regard to the provision for the church's spiritual edification, a much more systematic exposition of the Scriptures than is common in

* "The true aim of every one who aspires to be a teacher is, or ought to be, not to impart his own opinions, but to kindle other minds. I care very little, comparatively, whether you adopt my views or not, but I do care much to know that I can be the humble instrument, in this or higher matters, of leading any man to stir up the power within him, and to form a creed and faith which are in a living way, and not on mere authority, his own."—*Robertson's Lectures on Poetry*, pp. 43, 44.

England ; and also, without imposing its observance to the bondage or the inconvenience of individuals, the weekly participation of the Lord's Supper : and I would suggest for consideration, the more frequent employment of a plurality of pastors, the desirableness of even much additional aid from music, from symbol, and from art in general, and the advantages of at least the partial use of a liturgy.

I, of course, assume the discontinuance of pew-rents ; which, however, needs not prevent the appropriation of as many sittings as are required for the use of the regular attendants, if it is understood that the sittings are for use and not for ostentation. But it again deserves our distinct notice, that the discontinuance of pew-rents would necessitate an entire change in our financial system. The deacon's office would become a really onerous position. Chosen for the purpose not only of expending but of collecting money, that is, of obtaining from the church the sums required for its operations, the deacons should be held responsible for giving to every man the fullest opportunity of considering what the several operations demand. Perhaps in this country the plan of private subscriptions, admitting as few public collections as possible,

would be found the most consistent with the general habits. But whatever plan might be adopted, the deacons' duty would be to cause every man to know what proportion he gave of what was required : and on the supposition of such conduct on their part as, while not betraying confidence, should yet prevent a man from taking credit not his due, I see no reason to doubt the efficiency of this pure voluntaryism. Our richer people will always, perhaps, have, and I think that they will always cheerfully take, as among all denominations they have usually taken cheerfully, opportunities to supply the larger portion of the church's resources; all that they will require being, that church-fellowship shall not be abused for the manifestation of a spirit, and for other purposes, such as the very sense which has enabled them to acquire wealth, or in the exercise of which they are willing to use wealth in Christian service, condemns because inconsistent with all order, with the specific design of the fellowship, and with the explicit will of Him who is not the author of confusion but of peace in all churches of the saints.

Let it be again repeated, that when a Christian church assembles openly for business, with the book of God before it, it is scarcely possible

that, however poor a man may be, his poverty, if he be a man of moral worth, shall be despised so that his wisdom shall not be heard. But if nothing would be more revolting than the depreciation of his wisdom on account of his poverty, it is surely not unseemly that such general ability and high principle as a Christian use of wealth indicates, should be fairly weighed by those who profit from it; and that if a faithful pastor as one steward, so, too, any rich man who is faithful as another steward of the manifold grace of God, should be highly esteemed in love for his work's sake. It was certainly thus in the times and with the will of the apostles ; and though by the discontinuance of pew-rents a church might declare its determination not to lose the poor on account of their poverty, it should be no less careful to retain the rich who are wishful to be rich in good works, and with whom, after all, it will find itself unable to dispense.

Yet, perhaps, were that same spirit more generally evoked by deacons among the members of a church, which the apostle Paul evoked among the churches of Macedonia and Achaia, there would never be need, I say not that the richer should contribute more largely than the poorer, but that any should be so eased as that

others should be burdened. On the general point, however, I must most strenuously insist, that if a church's finances be in disorder, or if they be not satisfactorily conducted, it is hardly possible to exclude divers spiritual evils. If second to the able pastor, yet second only do I account the deacons who use the office of a deacon well: and when saying of the former, "God speed him!" it is but seemly to add of the latter, because of the house of the Lord our God, and for our brethren and companions' sakes, "And may they, too, magnify their office, and thus purchase to themselves a good degree."*

But that I may not be tedious, I must now draw these discussions to a close. And as of all other matters involved in the being of a church I believe that so much was said in former lectures as to render further illustration unnecessary, I

* "To churches without endowments, ecclesiastical finance is a matter of essential importance. It is Isaac Taylor, we think, who remarks, in his *Life of Wesley*, that the question of finance is the rock on which unendowed churches are most apt to split. . . . What we desire on the subject is not an angry controversial wrangle, but such a calm inquiry as would be satisfactory to men of earnest practical spirit, and would help to prevent churches from falling out, as they are so apt to do, in regard to their financial arrangements." — *The News of the Churches*, July 1, 1856.

feel that I have detained you long enough for my purpose. Let me now exhibit the conclusion of the whole matter.

I believe, then, that amidst the great moral community of men it pleases God to reconcile countless numbers to Himself by Jesus Christ; and that it accords with His will, that such of these as can conveniently meet together, shall associate as a church for the promotion of their spiritual edification in common to His glory. It is manifest, I suppose, that as those whom He reconciles are hereby absolved from no natural duty towards mankind at large, but are rather brought under peculiar stimulus to discharge all natural duties, as well as to undertake new duties also, so the particular individuals who constitute a church, are hereby absolved from no special duty towards any fellow-man who also is reconciled to God, but are rather placed under influences that should promote their exemplification of whatsoever things are true, honourable, just, pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous, and praiseworthy, whilst to all that are without God's family, so also not less to all that are within. Union to a particular church dissolves no obligation towards fellow-Christians who are not in that church, however it may strengthen them,

and may also furnish opportunities for the exhibition of brotherly love towards some who might otherwise have been unknown.

It follows, then, that no ecclesiastical usages should be adopted, and no church-institutions formed, tending to prevent co-operation between the church-members and other Christian people in any matter common to all, and thus to lower a church into a sect, a denomination, or a member of a sect or denomination. Observing this, then also the church will be accountable for no movements of other religious bodies, whether churches or societies for more specific objects ; and it will thus involve no member in a single procedure but such as he has had a member's opportunity of controlling. No definite relation, therefore, will be formed with other churches ; although just as correspondence may naturally arise between a church, and, for instance, a missionary society, so, too, may it occasionally arise between churches aiming at the same general objects, and between the officers of these churches ; certificates of Christian character from one church to another having, of course, great power, I say not formal obligation ; opportunities often arising at which counsel may be advantageously obtained ; and, especially, the

exchange of pastoral services conduced much to general profit.

Whatever regulations may be required will be adopted, also, in order that those on whom the chief real responsibility for the church's good estate devolves, may have proportional opportunity to exert the influence which is ever commensurate with responsibility : it being esteemed axiomatic, that the Sense of the community is indispensable for its well-being, and that Sense comes not where disorder reigns, or where mere nominal responsibility triumphs, a responsibility that gives no pledges of its good behaviour.*

Each separate church, moreover, should so act as to give all possible facilities for any Christian to whom it might be convenient to enter into its

* I know it to be true of many churches, I believe it to be true of a great many, that if a single member opposes the introduction of a proposed member, or the adoption of any innovation, his wish is allowed to prevail. I have often heard the public justification of this usage ; a usage, I apprehend, that would have been denounced by apostles as antichristian.—I cannot refrain from this my only opportunity of referring to the recent expulsion of the Rev. J. Macnaught from the Liverpool Clerical Society. What an illustration of my earlier remarks concerning ministerial associations ! Could no additional illustrations be furnished by members of the London Congregational Board, or by those of provincial associations of a similar kind ?

fellowship. And as where men much congregate, at least in countries where civil freedom is enjoyed as it is in Britain, that which constitutes convenience will be chiefly the adaptation of the public worship and other exercises to a man's conscious necessities, it follows in particular that all fiscal and other arrangements should be such as to give men every facility to join whatever church they please, and especially to impose no pecuniary burden upon them, at the same time that they shall have ample encouragement to contribute to the common fund.

No difficulty in entering into such a church as this, then, would be felt by people of the noblest birth and highest breeding, of whose individual faith and piety, when we plebeians are admitted to scenes of its manifestation, we are accustomed to speak hopefully, or even with admiration; though because of their sharing in occupations and pleasures from which circumstances have debarred us rather than our own religion restrained us, and which to those individuals are as harmless as our engagements or pastimes are to us, most Independents are accustomed to deny their qualifications for church-fellowship, and to regard them with unnecessary or with affected pity.

To this church, too, any poor man, any pauper who belongs to Christ, would be as welcome as he is to the sun-shine that rejoice all without respect of persons. Here the rich and the poor, the learned and the unlearned, the absolutist and the republican, all, as many as should desire to place mind and heart beneath the influence of the cross and the crown of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the majesty of God, would meet together for preparation in common for God's spiritual service and enjoyment, according to their several degrees of light and capacity, both in this life and in the life which is to come. Nor while faith remains in the eternal covenant, with its revelation of God's great purpose to pour out of His Spirit in these latter days where-soever Christ is fully set forth according to God's testimonies in all ages concerning Him, can we doubt that in a church where public opinion will be found beneath, not a circumscribed portion, but the entire aggregate of all those influences which God has designed for the formation of a just public opinion, truth and right feeling will prevail against all temptations to their opposites, and all things will be done unto edifying.

Trained, too, in such churches, if a land

abounded in them, men would pass from district to district, or from town to town, and would meet with all that they could in reason and in modesty expect; provision, I mean, for their general spiritual edification in love, although their new-found brethren might be otherwise minded than themselves in some respects.

In short, let Personal Individuality, Ecclesiastical Independency, and Spiritual Catholicity, these three lines constitute the triangle within which it is desired that the church, a circle, shall be inscribed, and whereon it shall rest equally on all sides; and to those who are not sensual, but have the Spirit, the problem can be no great difficulty: while the longer that I either muse on principles or watch experiments, the more thoroughly I am persuaded that if any one of the lines be shortened, the church will lose in both symmetry and strength, and that if any one be altogether awanting, the church will, in course of time, be nowhere.

But it is right to anticipate, formally and respectfully, a few objections that may be not unreasonably urged against the pure Independency proposed. For it may be said, in the first place, that an unholy latitudinarianism might soon characterize a church whose discipline was

so relaxed as I have represented. Now, against all such expressions as "latitudinarianism," and "relaxed discipline," I must enter a quiet but firm protest. They assume what ought not to be assumed, and insinuate what ought not to be insinuated. But confronting what is meant, without tarrying on the rather offensive forms of speech too frequently employed to designate it, while I disclaim all paradox, and am desirous to use none but words of sobriety, I must yet express my belief, that latitudinarianism would be diminished rather than increased were our present discipline relaxed ; and in saying this I am not wishful to ride off upon an equivocal expression. For I have a confident persuasion that our stricter discipline generates a large amount of secret speculation and scepticism in our churches, which degenerate into heartless indifference to truth and petrified imperviousness to all external spiritual energy, notwithstanding the respectable exterior of church-fellowship ; numbers of men, meanwhile, who would have joined and adorned our churches if habituated to a more genial discipline, and would, perhaps, have exerted more corrective power than they would have experienced, feeling compelled either by respect for our wishes, or by disapprobation of our

course, to remain where they are classed by us with unbelievers.

It is not possible, I think, to form an idea, according to the Scriptures, of what churches were in apostolic times, without reaching the conclusion that if we tried we should fail to make ours as latitudinarian in fact as they were. But it came to pass in course of time that this latitude was deemed undesirable; as, indeed, the use often made of it was unquestionably pernicious. For it must needs be that offences come; even as the apostle Paul says, "There must be also heresies, or schisms, among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you." The apostle John, too, speaking of some whom he called Antichrists, says— "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us; but they went out, that they might be manifest that they were not all of us." It was in prevention, now, of the latitudinarianism that permitted the rise of offenders, heretics, and antichrists among the Christian people, that such tests and creeds and various modes of probation were adopted as, in part at least, produced ultimately the natural and deadly consequences, deadly I mean to a

Catholic Christian love, of sects, and organizations of churches, and hierarchical gradations. Far better had it been, had the early latitudinarianism been preserved ; than which I plead for none more ample. Then would a church have been in profession, what it will be always in reality, a ward in the vast Moral Hospital in which the Great Physician conducts the cure of countless diversities of disease, rather than a self-constituted class of patients who affirm one another's present restoration to such a state of health as entitles them to privileges from which they debar as many of their fellow-patients as demur to the arbitrary by-laws that they institute.

It should never be forgotten on this subject, that the Holy Ghost is the great guardian of His own truth; that He is pledged to secure its perfect triumph; and that to employ other means for its conservation than the means of His own appointment, is an intrusion for which we have no warrant. Nor, perhaps, can we act at all in this way, without at the same time omitting means far better adapted than those of our own devising to secure the object. For in proportion to a church's contracting of the Scriptural latitude, must be the seclusion of itself from all other churches except such as are con-

tracted in the like manner; so that it loses the salutary action of a wider public opinion and, I will say, of a generous rivalry to present a full-orbed truth before the world, for the sake of the security, I think it a slavish and a false security, of subscriptions, pledges, tacit agreements, and ordeals. For if a church, or a system of churches, has once committed itself to the position, that truth under the guidance of the Holy Ghost will always assume the form and the proportions that they specify, sects, and such antipathies as tend to the exaggeration of the sectarian peculiarities, are the inevitable consequence, rather than such sympathies as provoke to the good work of eliciting all truth for the good of all.

But it is also objected to a pure Independency, that it makes insufficient provision for the occasional occurrence of schismatical events. I can grant, now, that modern Independency may be advantageously compared with other polities in respect of both the peace of its several churches, and the internal harmony enjoyed between them. But when this peace and this harmony are attributed to the partial organization of its churches, or to the mutual support experienced among its pastors, or to any peculiarity which a purer Independency would cast aside, I believe, first, that

there is here a singular forgetfulness of the recent rise of some of these auxiliaries; and secondly, that their action for good is much exaggerated, and that the advantages resulting from the removal of disabilities from the poor, of the various causes that I have specified of mutual jealousy among our members, of barriers to the entrance and the action among us of men of intelligence and judgment, and of regulations which exclude the public eye from our proceedings, would much more than counterbalance all that we should lose by the proposed changes. Besides, as we saw in reference to the last objection, the severance of a formal union to a few churches would restore our just relations to all churches, and would so much the more expose us to the salutary observation of all, and to the brotherly competition of all in the pursuit of spiritual excellence. But if any church expects to perform its functions without the answering of very large and, perhaps, frequent demands upon its several members for mutual respect and forbearance, and upon itself as a body for the like treatment of other churches, it evinces both much ignorance of human nature when its partakers meet in society for any object, and when the members of one society hear of the deeds and the changes of kindred societies,

and its adoption of a very low standard of brotherly love. Farther than this I can only remind you of frequent apostolic intimations to the effect, that it is not always possible to live peaceably with all men.

But, in the third place, it may be urged that the proposed confinement of a church's objects would retard the diffusion of Divine truth and the due multiplication of churches. But it should be remembered that when churches have professed these last mentioned objects, they have done very little for the attainment of them. Individual men have done much; societies for specific religious purposes have done much; and no little has resulted from our occasional church-divisions of a painful nature; but by means of a church's own machinery the amount effected has been small. I myself think that, unless in rare cases, a church as such will never accomplish much for the dissemination of Divine truth beyond its immediate sphere of action; its own proper object being such as not to allow it. But if its members be liberated from unseemly ecclesiastical restrictions on their personal liberty; if they be educated to view all things with a catholic rather than a sectarian eye; and if the principles of association with any good men for

worthy purposes be inculcated; all which would necessarily be done in the church that I have supposed; it would be difficult to say what services would be left undone in which a church could then properly and advantageously engage: and no more place, therefore, would be found for this objection.

But I would now advert to a fourth, of a more specific nature. For it may be inquired whether any provision would be made by this reformed Independency for the preparation of future pastors. My answer is prompt, however; that almost whatever is now done could be then done, inasmuch as individuals could then support our colleges precisely as individuals for the most part support them now. Of course our colleges would be brought into fuller harmony with reformed churches, were the character of their trust-deeds, and of much of their discipline, modified according to the reform in the churches. My own opinion, too, is rather decided, that beyond the providing for such chairs as may be called professional, those which aim not at a pupil's general education but at his particular preparation for a pastor's life, and, it may be, the further providing of what are called scholarships for candidates who have successfully stood a

specified examination, little can be well done by any public assistance in the formation of our future pastors. Private assistance would be often needed, and it could still be gained; and as it could be received without either the exposure of a man's private circumstances to the eye of the public, or the restricting of his mind, it would be altogether unobjectionable.

And it may be gravely doubted whether, if Independent churches were once so Catholic as to be likely to become general throughout the nation, the prospect of a demand would not be sufficient to cause theologians to open classes in connexion with institutions for general education, without endowments or subscriptions, and without sectarian restrictions. But be this as it might, only let the pastorate of our churches once appear an honourable service for any man, whatever be his breeding and his circumstances, and we have no more cause to doubt that eligible men would be forthcoming to avail themselves of such advantages as might be within their reach, or to give themselves to the church's service, a free gift, well equipped for the ministry without even the slightest previous charge to any public body, than we have to doubt the efficacy of those great providential laws which, the more that they

are honoured, secure to a greater extent the general well-being of mankind.

Lastly, if it be inquired whether a single church, formed and conducted as I have described, could stand alone, especially if secretly opposed, that is, misrepresented and maligned by the other Independent churches, and if repelled from the exchange with them of those courtesies and neighbourly good offices for which so many opportunities occur, I can only say that the thing has often been done, and this, too, notwithstanding accumulated hostilities; that in all probability it will require to be often done again in the course of those ecclesiastical changes which await this country; and that if, when attempted in the future, it should in any instance fail through the machinations of the adversary, the worst of the consequences must in nature rest upon their spirits who shall be agents in the effecting of the failure, not upon the men who may be the sufferers in the work of Christ. And although, as I have more than once intimated, what might be termed an extensive proselytism to Independency is scarcely within the range of sober expectation in a land like this, yet may the multiplication of the best models of Independency, whereby the Independent churches that

now are may gradually trim themselves, and whereunto the chief formers of the national opinion may refer as what is both practicable and much to be desired, be among the most acceptable services that they would render who, while not occupying great space, nor born to occupy it, before a nation's eye, would yet do deeds in comparative seclusion, for the which in the revolutions of the ages a nation and a world may be the better; deeds, too, that shall follow them while they in rest and glory await the final issue.

But I find no words fitter for conclusion than some more of the weighty sayings of John Milton, who in his "Speech for the Liberty of Unlicensed Printing" says, "And now the time in special is by privilege to write and speak what may help to the further discussing of the matters in agitation. . . . And though all the winds of doctrine were let loose to play upon the earth, so truth be in the field, we do injuriously by licensing and prohibiting to misdoubt her strength. Let her and falsehood grapple; who ever knew truth put to the worse in a free and open encounter? Her confuting is the best and surest suppressing. He who hears what praying there is for light and clear know-

ledge to be sent down among us, would think of other matters to be constituted beyond the discipline of Geneva, framed and fabricked already to our hands. Yet when the new light which we beg for shines in upon us, there be who envy and oppose, if it come not first in at their casement. What a collusion is this, whenas we are exhorted by the wise man to use diligence, to seek for wisdom as for hidden treasures early and late, that another order shall enjoin us to know nothing but by statute! I fear yet this iron yoke of outward conformity hath left a slavish print upon our necks; the ghost of a linen decency yet haunts us. We stumble and are impatient at the least dividing of one visible congregation from another, though it be not in fundamentals; and through our forwardness to suppress, and our backwardness to recover any enthralled piece of truth out of the gripe of custom, we care not to keep truth separated from truth, which is the fiercest rent and disunion of all. We do not see that while we still affect by all means a rigid external formality, we may as soon fall again into a gross conforming stupidity, a stark and dead congealment of wood and hay and stubble forced and frozen together, which is more to the sudden degenerating of a church

than many subdichotomies of petty schism. . . . Yet if all cannot be of one mind, as who looks they should be ?, this doubtless is more wholesome, more prudent, and more Christian, that many be tolerated, rather than all compelled. . . . And what do they tell us vainly of new opinions, when this very opinion of theirs, that none must be heard but whom they like, is the worst and newest opinion of all others, and is the chief cause why sects and schisms do so much abound, and true knowledge is kept at distance from us. . . . But to redress willingly and speedily what hath been erred, and in highest authority to esteem a plain advertisement more than others have done a sumptuous bride, is a virtue, honoured lords and commons," —honoured fathers and brethren,—“answerable to your highest actions, and whereof none can participate but greatest and wisest men.” And elsewhere he says, “And thus I leave it as a declared truth, that neither the fear of sects, nor of rebellion, can be a fit plea to stay reformation, but rather to push it forward with all possible diligence and speed.”

“Our comfortable expectation and most thirsty desire whereof” (if using “more last words” I may thus accommodate to my purpose the close

of Hooker's preface to his immortal work on the *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*), "Our comfortable expectation and most thirsty desire whereof, what man soever amongst you shall any way help to satisfy, (as we truly hope there is no one amongst you but some way or other will,) the blessings of the God of peace, both in this world and in the world to come, be upon him more than the stars of the firmament in number."

APPENDIX.

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APPENDIX

ON

DENOMINATIONAL LITERATURE:

BEING A REPRINT OF THE FIRST SENTENCES AND THE CONCLUSION OF AN ARTICLE ON "THE ALLEGED ILLITERACY OF DISSENTERS," CONTRIBUTED BY ME TO THE *Eclectic Review* OF MARCH 1848.

THE state of literature among dissenters has long pressed heavily upon us. There are not many themes that awaken us to thoughtfulness so serious. For our literature exhibits both our mental and our moral strength. It indicates our comparative fitness to affect for good the destinies of our country and the world. It is significant of the character of our religion, of the extent of our sympathy with the mind of God, and of the degree of our approximation towards a perfect understanding of the nature of his providential government of human minds. . . . Two or three of the chief faults that we discover in our literary character we now purpose to expose.

And we view with serious alarm a tendency to isolate our literature from the literature of our



country. We hear much talk about denominational literature. We would as soon hear of denominational science, denominational botany, anatomy, or politics. If other men will have nothing to do with our Calvinism and Independency, so be it. They may gain something better if they can. They thus form religious denominations ; and the more, the greater pity. But it ill becomes us to make a denominational literature while complaining of denominational religions. If because of the world's dislike of our religion we forbade their sharing in our literature, the resentment though ungenerous would still have an air of dignity. But to exclude ourselves from the world's literature on account of the world's exclusion of our religion, shows at once both the petulance of babyism and its feebleness for aught but self-destruction. We hate an *imperium in imperio* ; we pity a Cracow or a San Marino. To be sent to "Coventry" is an index that our temper is unsocial ; for a man to send himself there proves as well that he will have a fool for his companion.

If by "denominational literature" were meant nothing more than descriptions and defences of our religious creed and practices, histories of their rise and progress, statistical accounts, and periodical or other publications respecting the faults, the operations, and the *desiderata*, of our churches ; we should not be disposed to quarrel with the phrase, or be alarmed by the facts that it denoted. The last, however, of these four classes of productions could alone be strictly called "denominational ;" as probably of use to none but the "denomination" it addressed. The other

"works" would furnish information of the first importance to all inquirers concerning men and manners ; nor does any reason, general or special, confine the preparation of them to the body of whose peculiarities they treat. All such publications, therefore, and, of course the comprehensive class the authorship of which is the only thing denominational about them, ought to be regarded as contributions to the national literature, subjected to the general laws of criticism, and used according to their fairly estimated qualities.

We see, however, indications of a tendency among us to a very different course from this. We are told, for instance, that we do not accredit our own authors, or support them, or take pains to multiply them ; that hence our "denominational literature" is impoverished ; and that hence the literary life among us fails. What preposterous balderdash is this ! If the whimperers itch so, let them write. The market is an open one. If they square the circle, every man will buy their "Cocker." De Foe is read, and Milton, though each was a dissenter. A dissenting grocer thrives, however spiritual, if he know his trade, sell good figs, and abstain from cheating. He thrives, that is, as well as others ; provided that the market is as open as the literary. But a denominational grocer, we apprehend, would quickly starve ; at least if, like his brethren the denominational literati, he should sell bad plums, charge them above market price, and all the while affect to be the conferrer of a benefit. The author, the bookseller, and the grocer, all must work for the vast commonwealth ; or if they find it convenient to prepare goods for one particular depart-

ment of the *citizens*, they must refrain, unless in special cases such as those already granted, from aiming to supply each *the religious body* to which he happens to belong.

Exclusiveness, it is true, would do but little harm to any but a man's own friends. If any person sell good wares, the public *will* obtain them; and we never heard of a dissenting author at all reluctant to gratify the public by the sale of his. If he compose a nonsuch history of no-man's land, a treatise on "Backsliding," "Og," "Belshazzar," "Judas," "Bethlehem," "Sacred Mounts," and "Sacred Founts," and "Guides," and "Manuals," and "Spiritualized Cookery Books," and "Diaries," and "Glimpses;" well, if the public want such literature, and he can sell it to them good enough, it would be a thousand pities that they should not trade. But if the public do not want it, neither, he may depend upon it, does his "denomination." He, perhaps, wants the "denomination;" that is another matter. If the "denomination" want his wares, let them do as their neighbours do; let them go to the open literary stores and buy. If they will not buy of him, let the simpleton be satisfied and print no more. But let him not call his refuse "works," and other such, a denominational literature. Let him not complain of his denomination as ungrateful and illiterate because they will not buy the rubbish. Let him not exemplify a theory of authorship which, fully carried out, would soon make our libraries no better than literary stercus, and reduce the "denomination" to the function of buyers of such rogues' most worthless compost. We

take no notice of the holy tone and the disinterested air with which such conduct is continually forced upon us. But only let it in its best form be maintained and tolerated for a score or two of years, and the less truth that should henceforth be told about the evangelical dissenters, the better would it be for their reputation and their cause. "Denominational news" is one thing, and is necessary: let us have no "literature" but what all men have as well as we, such as bears every test, and, notwithstanding competition and censoriousness, is called for still.

But we wish to discriminate with caution. We have no objection to the constant succession of religious productions of a secondary order. There is, doubtless, a demand for such; and it is on many accounts better that living writers should prepare them, than that the cottage-literature of a former generation should be exclusively that of our own. Theology, as truly as grammar and geography, should have the benefit of man's acquisitions and experience; and the benefit should hardly be monopolized by the men of opulence and leisure. Style, too, and tastes are ever changing. Book-making has fashions. And the reputation of the living preacher may gain a currency for his published sermons, or his other writings, such as could not be secured for the merely equal writings of the dead. Give us, then, by all means, "milk for babes," and plenty of it too; but let us have no more than what the public calls for, than what can be disposed of in the open market of the commonwealth. Let it be ticketed as what it is, a certain kind of thing for certain kinds of minds; and

let the minds, or their friends for them, get the thing. Only if they will not, let not other kinds of minds be charged with neglect of *their own* literature. Let not every species of appeal, from the mean and false to the rude and shameless, be adopted in order to secure a sale for what would be otherwise unsaleable. Let not ministers become unlicensed hawkers of their own ware, or paid agents for the sale of either brethren's property or booksellers'. Let not reviewers, from the fear of resentful piety, whatever be its influence, or on the pretext of brotherly affection for the devoted author, call on every man who has a shilling to exchange it for the shilling's worth (?) before him. Let the dissenting butcher who imposes carrion on his eating friends for beef, be as much entitled to his denomination's custom as the dissenting author who imposes mawkishness upon his reading friends for sense. As well get copies cut and sewed of a sainted pastor's cast off garments, and disposed of for his widow's benefit, as copies printed of what he either would or ought to have been ashamed of acknowledging before the world as the workings of his soul. "Good wine needs no ivy bush." Introductory prefaces, recommendatory signatures, friendly critiques, pathetic appeals, ministers' douceurs and *per centages*, be they all, and such like, resolutely, sternly, and without one exception, eschewed, denounced, put down by the strong hand of every man of strength, till nothing like denominational literature remains. Few men can buy the "wine" thus signalized and buy "good wine" too. Those who can, are usually too sensible to drink as well as buy. Those who can-

not, buy the bad, drink, and are poisoned; deluded by the outcry of our doctors and inspectors about their duty to their denomination and its literature. To bring texts against us is in vain. The ignoramuses would only raise our indignation higher. If we must be cheated, let us not be cheated thus. Use not a text for a pretext. Or if you will torment us till we buy, calling us your brethren, and insisting on it that we show our love to you by buying, sell us, we pray you, anything you have, quack medicines, quack perfumery, dirt, or anything unmentionable even, but force us not to buy denominational, that is, *your* literature. "It hurts our understanding;" it depraves our sensibilities; it emasculates our soul. Besides, we too can quote texts, and can annotate them also. For "if any man will not work"—and we understand, work well, not ill—"neither shall he eat."

We shall now advert to another fault, which, if it be somewhat less conspicuous than it was twenty years ago, is still too mischievous to be altogether overlooked. We refer to the timid spirit with which so many of our ministers regard the influence of general literature. Some of them, no doubt, fear derision of their own total want of education and polite reading; and others, comprising, too, we apprehend, no few whose goodly octavoes are the coveted admiration of their brethren, shrink from a comparison of "works" like theirs, however vaunted, with those of a Hampden, a Davison, a Wiseman, to say nothing of Germans and the Anglo-German school. The former are the worthies whose boast is that at all events they

know the *gospel*, and can preach it ; the latter may be recognised by their adoption of the popular principle of mutual assurance, and their exemplification of the ancient adage, “Ka me, Ka thee.” Of the two we honour most the former. They hate learning, it is true, and do the little that they can to check it. But they are not chargeable with dissimulation ; and their folly is manifest to most men. Their more important brethren, with outcry loud enough about their patronage of general literature, give but too much proof of ardour for the sale among the laity of no other books than such as compete not with their own. Each calls his neighbour “that distinguished man,” and each receives his neighbour’s praise in turn. False estimates of their pastors’ actual attainments and scholarship, and false notions of what literature is, are thus formed among the common people. The descriptions, too, current in their talk, of the stores, the researches, the accomplishments of every kind, of many of the more popular among their preachers, can seem to the initiated no better than unintentional burlesque. The absurdity of such descriptions, and the evident good faith of those who make them, restrain us from branding them as false. Amused, therefore, we must laugh ; but when our laughter is exhausted, we are not the more propitiated towards the *parvenus* who, by pretending merit which they cannot have acquired, mislead the simple-hearted folk who trust them, and, aspiring to the dignity of literati, lose both that and the worthier dignity of faithful pastors of their flocks.

But when speaking of the timid spirit characteristic

of so many of our ministers in regard to the influence of general literature, we alluded rather to the pious but, as we think, unworthy apprehensions of many highly estimable men respecting the undevotional influence of such literature on the religious sensibilities. Yet as we think the evangelical dissenters less affected by this fearfulness than any other class of evangelical Christians, and much less, too, than their immediate predecessors, we are not inclined to spend much effort in endeavouring to dispel it. Sufficient means are evidently in action to remove the evil. That which has already made us superior to others, will in time make us superior to ourselves. We are no more wishful than our friends are to see "Paul" disdained for the sake of "Punch," or "The Comic History of England" substituted for a steadier guide. Give us fact, too, without fiction, rather than fiction without fact. God's own assertions in the Bible, if the Bible must be winnowed, we shall prefer to any of the devil's there recorded. For what is the chaff to the wheat? and what is falsehood to the truth?

But we are not subpoenaed to give testimony in the cause of Revelation *versus* Literature. We know of no such cause. Revelation is the glory of literature. "The recorded utterances of spirit" is our definition of literature. We eschew an Index Expurgatorius. We deprecate all secret purposes of total abstinence from any kind of literature, however fiery, and to whatever mountains of its slain we may be pointed. From pledged teetotalism, in all its forms, we gravely turn. We use not alcohol as food for sucklings or for men. "Punch" is no favourite beverage of ours,

though there certainly is worse. We have often grieved to discover "Chapman's publications" where we have discovered them. We have often put the "Christian Witness" out of sight. Our own "Eclectic" has endured no better fate. Yet we would not assume the responsibility, if we possessed the power, of *destroying* all that Parker, Strauss, or Fichté ever wrote. We could burn men's living bodies just as soon, and thus hinder the heretics from writing more. Unbidden, to extinguish in eternal darkness, lights of whatever colour or portentous form, radiated from undying spirits, and suffered by the all-wise, forbearing, and all-controlling God to approximate us, is a task we dare not touch. He who hath made all things, even the wicked, for Himself, will do it haply some day; haply, never. We find no commission from him to attempt it now. Evil books, then, evil deeds, and all things evil, are for use. "And here is the mind that hath wisdom." The who, the where, the when, the how, the how much, and the how long; all these are trying questions. We do what we can to answer them. Let him who can aid us make the essay. We bid him "God speed!" We wish him good success in the name of the Lord. Only when undertaking to show us how to use the world, let him not pronounce it too bad to be used at all.

Connected with this topic is the all important one of ministerial education. Inquiries into the nature of the general education of which the youth of our religious families are subjects, should then follow. Specific means might be suggested, too, for dispelling what insensibility exists among our ranks in relation

to the claims of literature, and for preserving able writers who arise among us from their own friends' unjust suspicion and attacks. But from these and kindred themes the want of space compels us for the present to refrain. We conclude: The religion and the literature of England are its highest glory; may both be yet more honoured in the persons of evangelical dissenters!



